Creaturely Encounters

Animals in the Libyan Literary Imaginary

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Abstract

Animals occupy a strikingly prominent place in modern Libyan fiction. Woven into allegory and evoked in remembrance of nomadic and rural lifestyles, they appear in a variety of narrative guises, most often encountering humans in situations of crisis, rebellion and transformation. Critique of political oppression is certainly one reason for their prominence, while Libya's rapid urbanization and movement into global oil markets represent other important contexts. From Independence in 1951, animals have been used to plot the course of the nation, assess its nomadic past and gauge its uncertain future. Examining fiction from the 1960s until 2011, I read animals, on one level, through allegory, interpreting them as sites for exploring human discourses and practices, and expressing human suffering and violence. I also, however, indicate how their encounters with humans are disruptive of social and political discourses, producing visions of shared human and animal suffering, and a spiritual and environmental wholeness transcending notions of nation. These visions, emerging from reflections on Libya's turbulent history and harsh geography, and marked by the folkloric, Qur'ānic and Sufi influences on its fiction, may be read through a 'creaturely poetics' (Anat Pick, 2012), in which the shared physical vulnerability of human and animal is emphasized. Through this poetics, animals become not allegorical mirrors of nation, but 'other worlds' in parallel to it, challenging human fallacies and accepted notions of citizenship, power and possession, and embodying alternative forms of relationality and being. From depictions of childhood to those of subsistence survival and deep ecological history, they are used to track primordial facets of the human and animal condition, with this reflection then brought to bear on modern contexts. As mystical signs and struggling creatures, as well as humanity's former 'self' and subjugated 'other', animals in Libyan fiction express the hardship of existence, as well as offering a means for imagining worlds beyond it.

Contents

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Introduction – A Nation and its Others: The Animals of Libyan Fiction

'*There is no creature that crawls on the face of the earth, no bird on the wing, but they are nations like you (umamun amthālakum). We have not neglected any matter in this Book, and then to God they shall be mustered.*'[1]

An issue of *Banipal Magazine*, published in spring 2011, was dedicated to contemporary Libyan fiction. Coincidentally, almost half of the seventeen featured authors wrote fiction in which animals play central and multifaceted roles. In one story, a dog named Ramaḍān journeys from the Libyan village of Mārīsh to fame in the Netherlands.[2] In another, an academic is haunted by lobsters, and, in a third, desert nomads revel in flocks of migrating birds, analysing the secrets of their flight, which they interpret to determine their own future.[3] From allegories to companion tales to mystical visions, animals represent a locus of exploration into humanity, its epistemologies, ethics and ontologies, and a means of political, environmental and spiritual reflection.

In wider Libyan fiction, too, animals are similarly prominent, as first noted by Marcia Lynx-Qualey, discussing the issue of *Banipal* on her blog, *ArabLit*, in 2011.[4] In particular, animals populate the pages of two of Libya's most prolific and celebrated authors. First mention must be made of al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm (1937-1994), the pioneer of the Libyan novel, and one of the nation's first literary heroes. Al-Nayhūm wrote all three of his

[1] Qur'ān 6:38, trans. Tarif Khalidi.
[2] 'Umar al-Kiddī, 'The Wonderful Short Life of the Dog Ramadan,' trans. Robin Moger, *Banipal 40* (2011): 49-60.
[3] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, 'Lobsters,' trans. Maia Tabet, *Banipal 40* (2011): 66-69; Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, 'Excerpts from the novel *New Waw*,' trans. William M. Hutchins, *Banipal 40* (2011): 162-174.
[4] Marcia Lynx-Qualey, 'The Animals in Libyan Fiction,' *Arablit*, May 8, 2011, accessed June 15, 2016, https://arablit.org/2011/05/08/the-animals-in-libyan-fiction/.

novels and many of his short stories about animals, employing them to question everything from the traditional values of Eid to the increasing tyranny of Muʻammar Gaddafi (al-Qadhdhāfī, 1942-2011). Meanwhile, Libyan-Tuareg author Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī (b. 1948), a close friend of al-Nayhūm, has attracted international and cross-disciplinary attention for his sustained exploration of the physical and spiritual boundaries of human and animal in the Saharan Desert.

Covering the years from 1960 until the collapse of Gaddafi's regime in 2011, my thesis examines parallels between these and other writers' portrayals of animals. Published just a few months before the regime's collapse, *Banipal 40* evidently suggests links between animals and critique of tyranny, but, looking further back, before Gaddafi even took power, other avenues for investigation become clear. From the beginnings of Libyan fiction, and the first days of the country's independence in 1951, animals have been employed to encode, negotiate and contest social and political discourses, tracking the country's progression into modernity and urbanisation. At the same time, they have been used to move into broader environmental and spiritual visions, exploring what humans share with their fellow creatures, as well as the violence and alienation that set them apart. Through these different levels of reflection, I examine how animals appear in parallel to human community and nation, reflecting yet destabilizing their structures, practices and identities. This, indeed, is a role they have played throughout the history of Arabic literature, in which, as in the case of Libyan fiction, they have figured prominently, despite receiving little critical attention.

In investigating Libyan fiction, I therefore aim to indicate the rich potential of this broader presence for future studies, suggesting methodologies upon which they might draw, and exploring elements of human-animal encounter that traverse geographies and ages. As Roger Allen suggests, there is a need for more regionally rooted approaches to literary criticism of Arabic fiction, focussing on '*khuṣūṣiyyāt*', the

cultural 'particularities' of countries as expressed in literature.[5] While exploring animals as one 'particularity' of modern Libyan fiction, I also indicate intriguing continuities with Arabic literature more broadly.[6] While bound by cultural specificity, animals provide a means of tracking the migration of literary genres across time and space, and exploring how the shared human experience of confronting the animal 'other' takes different literary forms. Before elaborating further on Libyan fiction, I therefore provide an overview of animals in both classical and modern Arabic literature. Given the aforementioned lack of research, this overview is necessarily brief and preliminary. In particular, I focus on how animals encode social values and structures, but also move narrative into the domains of wilderness and spirituality, themes that will also form a major part of my reading of Libyan fiction.

Animals in Arabic Literature: Negotiating Community and Wilderness

From the very first pre-Islamic *qaṣīdas* (poems), in the early sixth century, animals have been involved with negotiating the individual's relationship to community, nature and the divine. Most prominently, in the *raḥīl* section, poet and camel negotiate the desert alone together. As Suzanne Stetkevych suggests, this journey represents a rite-of-passage, in which the camel serves as a vehicle for the poet's 'liminal passage', ensuring his safe return to society, when the animal's sacrifice and consumption dramatise the reaffirmation of community and the individual's integration into it.[7] The

[5] Roger Allen, 'Rewriting Literary History: The Case of the Arabic Novel,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38, no. 3 (2007): 249.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speaks: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 29.

chivalric hunt that often follows performs a similar function, and has migrated across both classical and modern poetry in the form of the *ṭardiyya* (hunt poem).[8]

In the poetry of the pre-Islamic 'brigand poets' (*ṣu'lūk*, *ṣa'ālīk*), meanwhile, Stetkevych also observes an opposing 'paradigm of passage manqué', exemplified in the *Lāmiyyat al-'Arab* of al-Shanfarā (d. c. 550).[9] In it, the poet has no camel to bare him safely back to the tribe, and, rather than community, asserts his kinship with desert animals, embracing 'perpetual liminality' in the wilderness.[10] Between both forms of poetry, animals serve, on the one hand, to consolidate social bonds and, on the other, to symbolise rebellion against them. In addition, they are also consistently bound to the mythic and spiritual, with the camel traditionally said to be descended from the jinn, and onagers and oryx explored by Jaroslav Stetkevych as an '"Arabic" unicorn', serving as 'symbol and epiphany'.[11]

Moving several centuries forward, animals are also bound up with issues of rite-of-passage and good governance within the popular imagination of *Alf layla wa-layla*. As Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen comment, 'all of the narrative possibilities of animals are exploited' in these stories, from hunting scenes to metamorphosis.[12] In the story of prince Jānshāh, for example, a young man is distracted from his hunting party by a 'strangely coloured gazelle', before being waylaid by a monkey nation

[8] See: Jaroslav Stetkevych, 'The Hunt in the Arabic *Qaṣīdah*: The Antecedents of the *Ṭardiyyah*,' in *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*, ed. J.R. Smart, 102-118 (London: Routledge, 1996).
[9] Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals*, 151, 157; al-Shanfarā al-Azdī, *Qaṣīdat lāmiyyat al-'Arab*, with commentaries by al-Zamakhsharī and al-Mubarrad (Constantine: Maṭba'at al-Jawā'ib), 1882.
[10] Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals*, 157.
[11] Robert Irwin, *Camel* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 68; Jaroslav Stetkevych, 'In Search of the Unicorn: The Onager and the Oryx in the Arabic Ode,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 33, no. 2 (2002): 125.
[12] Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia, Volume Two* (Oxford: ABC CLIO, 2004), 478.

looking for leadership.[13] Ruling over them for some time, Jānshāh eventually escapes across the 'Valley of the Ants', returning to his own kingdom by way of a utopic land of birds. In each section, the story juxtaposes an ordered human world to the disorder, wonder and profusion of animals, always threatening to erupt. The universe of *Alf layla* is, above all, one in which species boundaries are porous, and where the wise rule of King Solomon and his magic ring have come to an end, leaving room for terrifying metamorphoses and animal worlds. As in the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*, animals therefore communicate both structures of community, and their abandonment for liminality, wilderness and the wonders of the natural world.

Alongside popular literature, animals also play a prominent role in the classical Islamic allegorical tradition, which, as Peter Heath comments, tackles issues of 'practical morality', 'philosophical speculation' and 'mystical experience'.[14] By way of example, Heath lists Ibn al-Muqaffa''s (d. c. 759) *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (750; *Kalila and Dimna*), '*Fī tadā'ī al-ḥayawānāt 'alā al-insān 'ind malik al-jinn*' (c. 961; 'The Complaint of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn') by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (Brethren of Purity) and *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* (c. 1169; *Alive, Son of Awake*) by Ibn Ṭufayl (c. 1105-1185).[15] In all three, animals are a central vehicle of allegory. *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, as Robert Irwin comments, draws upon the genre of the mirror-for-princes, in which instructive advice is given to rulers and advisors through the escapades of two jackals in a court of animals.[16] It thus serves to cement the structures and values of human community. On the other hand, '*Fī tadā'ī al-ḥayawānāt 'alā al-insān*, while inspired by the former, differs radically, as

[13] Malcolm C. Lyons, trans., 'The Story of Janshah,' in *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights, Volume Two* (London: Penguin, 2010), 394.
[14] Peter Heath, 'Allegory in Islamic literatures,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Robert Irwin, 'The Arabic Beast Fable,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55 (1992): 40; Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1984).

animals take men to trial for the damage they have done to a once pristine island in the mythical Green Sea.[17] Attracting numerous ecological readings, the allegory is a strikingly early example of literary reflection on the troubled nature of human-animal relations, and an overarching critique of the human species.[18]

Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓan also portrays a desert island, devoid of human presence, upon which the baby Ḥayy is stranded, and adopted by a gazelle who nurtures him.[19] After she dies some years later, Ḥayy dissects her body and perceives the secrets of the cosmos within it. Afterwards, he increasingly recognises her as his mother, dramatising, as Mahmoud Baroud observes, both mystical experience and rejection of conventional familial and social structures.[20] Among other spiritual allegories, the legend of pre-Islamic poet Majnūn Layla, and its transformation into a symbol of Sufi quest, also features animals prominently. In the legend, Majnūn's passionate love for Layla is frustrated and he retreats to a life of communion with animals in the desert. As As'ad Khairallah remarks, the legend 'achieved its universal appeal, because it expressed a collective need for rebellion against the rationalist claims of society'.[21]

Within the parameters of spiritual and ethical enquiry, several of these allegories may certainly be linked to a tradition inspired by the Qur'ānic concept of animals as '*āyāt*', 'signs' of divine creation that invite humans' contemplation on its perfection and

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[17] Lenn E Goodman and Richard McGregor, trans., *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22 of The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[18] Zayn Kassam, '*The Case of the Animals versus Man*: Toward an Ecology of Being,' in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Kimberley Patton and Paul Waldau, 160-169 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); and Lenn E. Goodman, introduction to *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*, trans. Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor, 1-56 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[19] Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīda, 1974).

[20] Mahmoud Baroud, *The Shipwrecked Sailor in Arabic and Western Literature: Ibn Ṭufayl and his Influence on European Writers* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 137-8.

[21] As'ad Khairallah, *Love, Madness, and Poetry: An Interpretation of the Maǧnūn Legend* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1980), 1.

wondrousness. Other examples include the corpus of '*ajā'ib* literature (literature of 'wonders'), exploring real and mythic creatures within encyclopedias and travel accounts. Undoubtedly, however, the most prominent example is al-Jāḥiẓ's (776-868) *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (*The Book of Living*). As James Montgomery observes, it is a 'totalising' work, attempting to capture existence in all its magnificent diversity, driven by a sense of 'the need to express gratitude to God for His creation by producing a comprehensive inventory of it'.[22] In all, the animal as '*āya*' also hints at humans' inability to achieve totalising knowledge, the relativity of their place within cosmic schemes, and the flaws within their social structures and convictions.

Within modern Arabic literature, animals also appear prominently in the work of some of the most celebrated authors, across the genres of the short story, novel and play. They first significantly appear in Romantic short stories, novels and poetry, serving as an innocent domain, juxtaposed to the corruption and laxity of the modern city. In Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān's (1883-1931) '*Yūhannā al-majnūn*' (1906; 'John the Madman'), for example, the protagonist is immersed in animals and the environment, representing what Robin Ostle describes as 'the peace and purity of nature that seem to represent all that men should be or once were'.[23] In early novels, similar pastoral ideals can be traced, exemplified by Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's (1888-1956) *Zaynab* (1913).

Admittedly, animals, in both Romantic literature and the social realism that followed, serve primarily as background detail, codifying, in the first instance, a lost innocence, and, in the second, issues of poverty and oppression in village and city. Throughout the twentieth century, they have also been increasingly used to allegorise political and social critique. Ṭaha Ḥusayn's (1889-1973) short story collection *Jannat al-ḥayawān*

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[22] James Montgomery, *Al-Jāḥiẓ: In Praise of Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 55.
[23] Jibrān Khalīl Jibrān, '*Yūhannā al-majnūn*,' in *'Arā'is al-murūj*, 80-109 (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1990); Robin Ostle, 'The Romantic Poets,' in *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M. Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97.

(1950; *The Paradise of Animals*), for example, represents a sustained exploration of Egyptian society through comparison with animals.[24] Most prominently, however, animals appear in modern political drama of the 1960s, with Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's (1898-1987) *Maṣīr ṣurṣār* (1966, *Fate of a Cockroach*) and Sa'dallāh Wannūs's (1941-1997) *al-Fīl yā malik al-zamān* (1969, *The Elephant, the King of all Time*) representing the most prominent examples.[25] In both, the titular cockroach and elephant are symbols of oppression, tyranny and growing political disillusionment.

Animals have also become central to modern experimental sensibilities, bringing together myth, symbolism and the fantastic, while continuing to convey dissatisfaction with social and political realities. In Zakariyā Tāmir's (b. 1931) short stories, they combine elements of political allegory with folkloric motifs, emerging in 'visionary and apocalyptic counter-worlds'.[26] In '*Ṣahīl al-jawād al-abyaḍ*' (1960; 'Neighing of the White Horse'), for example, a mythical white horse represents a man's longing to escape the hardship of life.[27] Animals also appear prominently in Tāmir's stories for and about children. His novella *al-Qunfudh* (2005; The Hedgehog) is narrated by a boy and infused with his imaginative interactions with the natural world, again exemplifying the motif of an innocent domain beyond the complications of both adulthood and human society.[28]

In the novel, meanwhile, animals become a focus of spirituality, intertextuality, and investigations into nation and environment. In 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's (1933-2004) *al-*

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[24] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Jannat al-ḥayawān* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li-l-Malāyīn, 1966).

[25] Sa'dallāh Wannūs, *al-Fīl yā malik al-zamān wa mughāmarat ra's al-mamlūk Jābir: masraḥiyatayn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1977).

[26] Ulrike Stehli-Werbeck, 'The Poet of the Arabic Short Story: Zakariyya Tamer,' in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010), 122.

[27] Zakariyā Tāmir, '*Ṣahīl al-jawād al-abyaḍ*,' in *Ṣahīl al-jawād al-abyaḍ*, 33-42 (Damascus: Manshūrāt Maktabat al-Nūrī, 1978).

[28] Zakariyā Tāmir, *al-Qunfudh* (Beirut: Riad El-Rayyes, 2005).

Nihāyāt (1977; *Endings*, 2007), the close relationship between a hunter and his dog is depicted amidst the encroachment of modern technology on a rural village.[29] Munīf also incorporates a series of animal fables, with two taken from al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, and all centring on what Allen describes as 'man's affection and admiration for animals, the traits which they show towards each other and even mankind'.[30] Meanwhile, in Ibrāhīm Naṣrallāh's (b. 1954) *Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍā'* (2008; *Time of White Horses*, 2012), the saga of a Palestinian family, from the Ottoman period to 1948, is interwoven with their bond with horses, alongside legend and lore about them.[31]

Among other prominent novels, humans and animals are joined through the trauma of violence. Ghāda al-Sammān's (b. 1942) *Kawābīs Bayrūt* (1976; *Beirut Nightmares*, 1997) and Hudā Barakāt's (b. 1952) *Ḥārith al-miyāh* (1998; *The Tiller of Waters*, 2008) both portray the Lebanese civil war through surreal visions of human-animal encounter in the streets of war-torn Beirut.[32] In the former, in particular, shared psychological distress produces empathy between human and animal, breaking down traditional species divisions, as observed by Nadine Sinno.[33] In other novels, identification with animals also serves to express a particular disconnect with human society, or to radically defamiliarize narrative perspectives. Khayrī Shalabī's (1938-2011) *al-Shuṭṭār* (1985; *Scoundrels*) is one, exploring modern Cairene society through the voice of a dog,

[29] 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf, *al-Nihāyāt* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2007).
[30] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 162.
[31] Ibrāhīm Naṣrallah, *Zaman al-khuyūl al-bayḍā'* (Beirut: al-Dār al-'Arabiyya li-l-'Ulūm, 2008).
[32] Ghāda al-Sammān, *Kawābīs Bayrūt* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Ghāda al-Sammān, 2000). Hudā Barakāt, *Ḥārith al-miyāh* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1998).
[33] Nadine Sinno, 'The Greening of Modern Arabic Literature: An Ecological Interpretation of Two Contemporary Arabic Novels,' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20, no. 1 (2013): 132.

while in Rawi Hage's (b. 1964) *Cockroach* (2008), a Middle Eastern immigrant in Canada becomes obsessed with the idea of turning into a cockroach.[34]

Finally, in 2014, as I was beginning my own research, three Moroccan authors were shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, all writing novels in which animals feature prominently, from a talking dog in Yūsuf Fāḍil's (b. 1949) *Ṭā'ir azraq nādir yuḥalliq ma'ī* (2013; *A Rare Blue Bird that Flies with Me*), to beliefs about sacred pike in Ismā'īl Ghazālī's (b. 1977) *Mawsim ṣayd al-zanjūr* (2013; *Season of Pike Fishing*), and a desert journey with camel in 'Abd al-Raḥīm Laḥbībī's (b. 1950) *Taghrībat al-'Abdī* (2013; *The Journeys of 'Abdi, known as Son of Hamriya*).[35] All three are certainly suggestive of broader trends within North African literature, and another project worth pursuing. As stated, however, my analysis is limited to Libya.

Primarily, this decision is driven simply by the prominence of animals in the country's fiction, from its earliest days until today, as well as the intriguing ways in which they are employed to comment on nation, environment and spirituality. Emerging from Libya's particular literary and religious traditions, and the contexts of its recent history, the resultant fiction, and the human-animal encounters it depicts, bring new dimensions to modern Arabic literature, and suggest new avenues for its further study, as will be explored. Another compelling impetus is the work of Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, whose depictions of animals have attracted numerous critical responses, from those exploring animals within ecological perspectives, to those exploring how they introduce new themes and aesthetics into Arabic literature.[36] Continuing both explorations, I

[34] Khayrī Shalabī, *al-Shuṭṭār* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1985); Rawi Hage, *Cockroach* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009).

[35] Yūsuf Fāḍil, *Ṭā'ir azraq nādir yuḥalliq ma'ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2013); Ibrāhīm Ghazālī, *Mawsim ṣayd al-zanjūr* (Cairo: Dār al-'Ayn li-l-Nashr, 2013); 'Abd al-Raḥīm Laḥbībī, *Taghrībat al-'Abdī* (Casablanca: Afrīqiyā al-Sharq, 2013).

[36] These studies will be mentioned in the course of my own analyses of al-Kūnī.

investigate how the distinctiveness of al-Kūnī's animals is rooted in the writing of other Libyan authors, whose fiction has been widely overlooked.

Interpreting human-animal encounters both as allegories, encoding social discourses, and as signs of disruptive paradigm-shifts, my study of Libyan fiction also brings nuanced perspectives to the field of critical animal studies, in which my work is broadly situated, and whose theoretical backdrop is introduced in the section on 'Animal Encounter'. Many studies within the field have been sceptical of the use of animals in allegory, and particularly fable, considering them to be no more than empty symbols, retaining none of their true characteristics, and even reflecting the way they are used and abused by humans in reality.[37] Within the context of Libya, its troubled history and harsh geography, however, my work explores how allegory and encounter can be read together, commenting on the human through the animal and the animal through the human, and offering challenging visions of the continuities between the two. In what follows, both allegory and encounter are further discussed, before my broader survey of the historical, political and environmental contexts of modern Libya, the development of its fiction, and the folkloric, Qur'ānic and Sufi influences upon it.

Animal Allegory: From Political Subversion to Species Critique

Under heavily censored regimes, literature featuring animals, particularly talking animals, tends to be read as political allegory, concealing subversive messages in nonhuman guise. In Libyan fiction, animals are, undoubtedly, employed in critique of power and injustice, whether as a manner of evading censorship, or to draw on traditional connections between animal fable, governance and political subversion. Under King Idrīs al-Sanūsī's (1889-1983) monarchy (1951-1969), censorship was rife,

[37] For a summary of these views, see Naama Harel, 'The Animal Voice behind the Animal Fable,' *Journal for Critical Animal Studies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 10.

while Gaddafi's reign (1969-2011) was an unspeakably brutal one, under which the country's cultural scene suffered greatly, with many writers and artists imprisoned or in exile. Citing author Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh (b. 1942), Ethan Chorin writes that Libya under Gaddafi 'was one of the few dictatorial regimes to maintain a government unit specifically dedicated to repressing innovation and artistic creation in all forms'.[38] Hisham Matar (b. 1970) also quips that 'though history can accuse the Gaddafi regime of a multitude of sins, indifference to literature was not one of them'.[39]

The Revolutionary Command Council's (*Majlis Qiyādat al-Thawra*) first major acts of oppression came in the early 1970s, with clashes between government forces and students leading to large-scale arrests, while, in 1972, all newspapers were brought under central control. With the creation of the Revolutionary Committees (*al-Lijān al-Thawriyya*) in 1977, the threat of imprisonment or 'disappearance' increased. Theoretically intended to mobilize popular political participation, the committees, in reality, served as an additional mechanism of surveillance and control. In the same year, leading intellectuals were called to a meeting and promptly arrested and imprisoned for the next decade. The regime's worst atrocity, meanwhile, came with the massacre of Abū Salīm Prison in 1999, leaving 1,200 people dead. An Amnesty International Report summed up the circumstances of individuals under the regime as follows:

> Routine abuses committed in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s included arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, torture and other ill-treatment, extrajudicial executions and deaths in custody. Victims ranged from political

[38] Ethan Chorin, *Exit Gaddafi: The Hidden History of the Libyan Revolution* (London: Saqi, 2012), 46.
[39] Hisham Matar, 'Tripoli Fruits,' review of *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, by Kamal Ben Hameda, and *Chewing Gum*, by Manṣūr Bushnāf, *Times Literary Supplement*, January 16, 2015, accessed June 20, 2016, http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/a-tree-that-scarcely-fruits/.

> dissidents living in Libya or abroad to suspected members or supporters of armed Islamist groups.[40]

Muḥammad al-Aṣfar (b. 1960) has written about these circumstances in more personal terms: 'For decades, we lived in terror, surrounded by spies and informants, facing the risk of imprisonment or "disappearance" at any moment. No one could intervene on your behalf; there were no real courts, no human rights, nothing'.[41]

Within the perspective of these oppressive conditions, animals certainly emerge as a means of communicating political critique. An early example is al-Nayhūm's *al-Ḥayawānāt* (1974; *The Animals*), depicting the disintegration of a jungle into tyranny. Commenting on it, al-Kūnī describes the 'powerful reaction' provoked on all levels of Libyan society by its searing portrait of the 'security forces' (*al-mu'assasāt al-amniyya*) in animal form.[42] Over three decades later, Wafā' al-Bū'īssā's (b. 1973) novel *Na'thal* (2007; *Na'thal*) dramatises events under Gaddafi's regime in similarly explicit fashion through a herd of talking goats.[43] Both novels were banned, while their authors left the country. Through both, alongside many others, it is clear that animals went hand-in-hand with political subversion, and became surrounded in a particular degree of suspicion, as wittily evoked by al-Aṣfar, depicting a debate concerning the possible meanings hidden in a description of a worm:

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[40] Amnesty International, 'Long Struggle for Truth: Enforced Disappearance in Libya' (London: Amnesty International, June 2010), 2.

[41] Muḥammad al-Aṣfar, 'Libya's Patient Revolutionaries,' trans. Ghenwa Hayek, *The New York Times*, March 2, 2011, accessed 15 June, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/opinion/03asfar.html?_r=0.

[42] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *al-Ḥayawānāt* (Benghazi: Maktabat al-Tumūr li-l-Kitāb, 2010); al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: rūḥ umam fī nazīf dhākira (al-juz' al-thānī)* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2013), 244.

[43] Wafā' al-Bu'issā, *Na'thal* (Benghazi: Dār al-Ruwwād, 2012).

> 'This text (*hādha al-naṣṣ*) must not be published,' declared Mr Finger, 'it is full of symbols and symbolism (*bihi ramziyya murammaza*). What is this "worm"? And this "trap"? He's attacking you, Mr Starling, insulting you and all you represent. Consider, for example, the relationship between starlings and worms and think of what is then signified by this "trap"'.[44]

While taking animals' subversive symbolic significance into account, I also examine how, in many authors' work, they move beyond being vehicles of fixed, political meaning. Through their unknowable gaze and vulnerable physicality, I explore how they deepen and nuance visions of injustice and oppression, exploring the workings of brutality on a broader scale, and producing multiple symbolic layers.

This is also my approach to issues of national allegory, the term controversially theorised by Fredric Jameson to suggest that the driving preoccupation of postcolonial literatures is to allegorize the nation-state through depiction of the lives of individuals within it.[45] In modern Arabic fiction, themes of modernity and nation-state are certainly prominent within depictions of individual, family and community, and scholarship concerning it has, implicitly and explicitly, drawn on notions of national allegory. National and animal allegory, meanwhile, have been explicitly linked in reference to al-Ḥakīm's *Maṣīr ṣurṣār*, juxtaposing a cockroach kingdom to a married couple's apartment.[46] For Robert Farley, the play reveals the irreconcilable gap between the Egyptian people and the Nasserist regime by shifting the perspective of the audience between human and nonhuman.[47] While intriguing, Farley's reading

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[44] Muḥammad al-Aṣfar, *Sharmūla* (Lattakia: Dār al-Ḥiwār li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2008), 218.

[45] Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,' *Social Text* 15 (1986): 65-88.

[46] Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Maṣīr ṣurṣār* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2005), trans. Denys Johnson-Davies, *Fate of a Cockroach: Four Plays of Freedom* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

[47] Robert Farley, 'National Allegory and the Parallax View in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's *Maṣīr Ṣurṣār*,' *Portals: A Journal in Comparative Literature* 10 (2013), August 21, 2013, accessed April 25, 2016,

makes no room for other levels of reflection, such as that most fundamental one concerning the distinction between human and animal life, and how this distinction can be employed to nuance, deepen and complicate allegory.

In reading animal fable and allegory, the interpretive process is therefore crucial. As Naama Harel has explored, the reader may choose whether to read animals solely for human meaning, or to consider what literature also says about them, and about humanity in general.[48] In a similar manner, Onno Oerlemans writes that allegorical representations of animals are often characterized by 'doubleness and complexity', and that they 'simultaneously hide and reveal the contested nature of the boundary between human and animals'.[49] Harel, furthermore, points to texts in which humans feature alongside animals as offering multiple possible readings, using George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) as an example of where animal suffering may be read both allegorically and literally.[50] Due to what Harel calls animals' 'ultimate weakness in culture', they have certainly become paradigmatic figures of suffering, as well as 'the prototype of excluded political groups'.[51] This does not, however, mean that their suffering is forgotten in allegory or should be neglected in criticism.

In Libyan fiction, depictions of human violence towards animals are particularly provocative and entangled. In a country which has witnessed so much poverty, warfare and human rights abuse, concern for animal rights is certainly problematised. In the context of South African literature, Wendy Woodward, for example, observes that writers felt more able to represent animals sympathetically after democracy was,

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http://portalsjournal.com/2013/national-allegory-and-the-parallax-view-in-tawfiq-al-hakims-masir-sursar-by-robert-farley/.

[48] Harel, 'The Animal,' 10.

[49] Onno Oerlemans, 'The Animal in Allegory: From Chaucer to Gray,' *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 20, no. 2 (2013): 297.

[50] Harel, 'The Animal,' 17.

[51] Ibid., 16.

nominally at least, established in the country.[52] On one level then, portrayals of animal suffering in Libyan fiction may, and perhaps must, be read as allegories for Gaddafi's brutality, displaced onto animals to evade censorship, or as a form of psychological distancing and displacement, such as that described by Carolyn Burke and Joby Copenhaver:

> When the political, religious, social, or personal risks are high, when we are standing close to the metaphoric fire, the use of animals has long provided intellectual and psychological distance and allowed us to critically explore that which we would not be comfortable exploring directly.[53]

Within the very fabric of language, the brutality of one human towards another is often expressed through animal similes, describing both victim and perpetrator. In Libyan fiction, people are, indeed, described as being carted 'like sheep' (*ghanam*) by the Italian military and herded 'like cattle' (*bahā'im*) by unjust rulers.[54] At the same time, however, such passing descriptions are accompanied by sustained and intense encounters between humans and animals, in which the animals' suffering produces expressions of empathy for the vulnerability and mortality shared by all. Similarly, the abuse of animals, while pointing to the injustice of particular political systems, also expresses unease over the brutal tendencies of humanity as a whole.

While the coincidence of animal allegory and national allegory is certainly one concern within my thesis, I therefore challenge it as well, suggesting that animals are naturally productive of investigations that transcend nation. Contrary to the traditional realist

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[52] Wendy Woodward, *The Animal Gaze: Animal Subjectivities in Southern African Narratives* (Johannesberg: Wits University Press, 2008), 14.

[53] Carolyn L. Burke and Joby G. Copenhaver, 'Animals as People in Children's Literature,' *Language Arts* 81, no. 3 (2004): 207.

[54] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 2005), 93; trans. May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley, *The Bleeding of the Stone* (Gloucestershire: Arris Books, 2003), 73. Sālim al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2008), 40.

novel, which, as Benedict Anderson suggests, obscures the notion of 'mankind' behind the 'deep horizontal comradeship' of nation, animal encounters prove eminently disruptive of it.[55] In much Libyan fiction, tenuous human relationships pale in contrast to bonds forged between humans and animals, and visions of towns and cities fade against physical geographies. To some extent, the prominence of animals in Libyan fiction therefore produces an 'unimagining' of nation, undermining straightforward notions of citizenship, identity, possession and power.

An example is the recent collection of short stories, *Fī hijā' al-bashar wa-madīh al-bahā'im wa-l-ḥasharāt* (2010; *In Praise of Beasts and Creepy-Crawlies: A Treatise against Humankind*), by al-Faqīh, quoted above.[56] On one level, al-Faqīh's collection could easily be analysed simply as political or national allegory, particularly in light of a later collection, published after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, whose title, *Fī hijā' al-ṭughāt* (2013; *A Treatise against Tyrants*) echoes the former, but shifts explicitly to the political.[57] Structured around encounters between humans and animals, *Fī hijā' al-bashar* certainly also explores tyranny. In '*al-Ṣurṣār fī-l-zinzāna*' ('Jailroach'),[58] for example, a political prisoner befriends a cockroach family, while in '*al-'Aqrab wa-l-za'īm*' ('The Scorpion and the Leader'), Idi Amin is almost killed by a scorpion.[59]

At the same time, however, the collection opens by citing Qur'ān 6:38, evoking animals as 'nations like you' (*umamun amthālakum*).[60] Each story is then based on the recurring motif of '*madīḥ*' (praise) of animals and '*hijā"* (satire) of humans, echoing al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, and shifting its encyclopedic celebration of God's wonderful creation into a

[55] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 7, 25.
[56] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Fī hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-bahā'im wa-l-ḥasharāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1997).
[57] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīḥ, *Fī hijā' al-ṭughāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Khayāl li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2013).
[58] Literally, 'The Cockroach in the Cell'.
[59] Al-Faqīh, *Fī hijā'*, 9-17, 18-30.
[60] Ibid., 7.

damning portrait of the place of humanity within it. Many of its stories therefore become interpretable on both literal and allegorical levels, concerning both species and nation, with the double perspective rendering its critique more nuanced and complex. '*Maṣra' al-naml*' ('Catantstrophe'),[61] for example, depicts both the brutality of two 'interrogator ants' (*namlatā al-taḥqīq*) towards a worker ant, and how it is provoked by the boredom of a human, idly toying with their society, and accidentally becoming complicit in its injustices.[62] Through this complex encounter, the local and specific are addressed in covert terms, within a deeper exploration of the dark impulses within the human condition, and the primordial form they take in violence towards animals.

Animal Encounter: Reading the Other

Human-animal encounters are certainly one of the most important theoretical axes of the interdisciplinary field of critical animal studies, exploring how humans respond to the alterity of animals through epistemological, ethical and ontological frameworks. Developing rapidly over the past three decades in disciplines ranging from literature to anthropology to religion, the field questions how humans conceive of animals and how they conceive of themselves through them, untangling, as historian Aaron Gross puts it, 'the tangled and circular ways that human communities everywhere imagine themselves – their subjectivity, their ethics, their ancestry – with and through animals'.[63]

In questioning the traditional distinctions between species, the field, in the wake of posthumanist trends of thought, also challenges the 'metaphysical anthropocentrism'

[61] Literally, 'The Slaughter of the Ants'.
[62] Ibid., 84.
[63] Aaron Gross, 'Introduction and Overview: Animal Others and Animal Studies,' in *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies*, ed. Aaron Gross and Jane Vallely (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 2.

underlying human thought.[64] For philosopher Mark Calarco, it is driven by two central questions: 'One question concerns the being of animals, or 'animality', and the other concerns the human-animal distinction'.[65] Put simply, animal studies explores the animal as both constitutive of human meaning, playing, as Steve Baker observes, 'a vital and potent role in the symbolic construction of human identity', and disruptive of it.[66] Animals are both 'good to think', and to 'unthink', expressed by Jean Baudrillard as follows:[67]

> In all this – metaphor, guinea pig, model, allegory (without forgetting their alimentary 'use value') – animals maintain a compulsory discourse. Nowhere do they really speak, because they only furnish the responses one asks for. It is their way of sending the Human back to his circular codes, behind which their silence analyses us.[68]

In Libyan fiction, humans are, indeed, sent back to their 'circular codes' by disruptive encounters with animals, echoing Jacques Derrida's famous meditation on the anguish he experiences when standing naked and confronted by his cat:

> As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the border crossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. And in these moments of nakedness, under

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[64] Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 6.
[65] Ibid., 2.
[66] Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press:, 1993), ix-x.
[67] Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Totemism*, trans. Rodney Needham (London: Merlin Press, 1964), 89.
[68] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Animals: Territory and Metamorphosis,' in *Simulacra and Similation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 137-138.

> the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, *I am (following) the apocalypse itself*, that is to say the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict.[69]

Derrida's vision of the animal gaze is productive of a 'proto-ethics', in which established systems of politics and law collapse before the paramount need to respond to the physical vulnerability of the 'other'.[70] As Calarco writes: 'At the proto-ethical level, then, Derrida has insisted that there is a certain disruptive force in animal suffering, one that affects and challenges us prior to any reflection or debates we might have on the ethical status of animals'.[71]

The 'proto-ethics' of the animal encounter has produced rich and varied reflection. Of particular interest to me is the concept of 'creaturely poetics', developed by Anat Pick as a method of reading literature for 'an expression of something *in*human as well: the permutations of necessity and materiality that condition and shape human life'.[72] As Pick puts it, creaturely poetics is not necessarily concerned with ascribing particular rights to one creature and not another, but simply extending 'attention' to the physicality of all.[73] As a reading strategy, it seeks 'contact with the flesh and blood vulnerability of beings', and allows for histories to be written from the perspective of victims, 'overtaken by or lost in history', rather than the victorious conquerors who direct it.[74] At the same time, Pick emphasises that the creaturely is not simply synonymous with the corporeal, but, as she writes, 'carries within it [...] an opening

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[69] Jacques Derrida, 'The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),' trans. David Wills, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 2 (2002): 381.
[70] Calarco, *Zoographies*, 120.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 5.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 3, 73-74.

unto a religious vocabulary of creation and created, and so attempts a rapprochement between the material and the sacred'.[75] Drawing on Christian mystic Simone Weil (1909-1943), Pick discusses how the juxtaposition of 'unforgiving materialism' and 'sacred vocabulary' provides both a means of demythologising mysticism and bringing together 'the material and mechanistic conditions of life and the wholly uncommon demands of the ethical'.[76]

Such a poetics provides a particularly conducive reading strategy for Libyan fiction, eminently suggestive of the shared vulnerability of human and animal, and productive of a different kind of 'attention' to animal rights activism in the West. The very Arabic term for 'creature', '*makhlūq*' – the past participle of the verb '*khalaq*, *yakhluq*' (to create) – already conveys a strong notion of 'createdness'. Libya's immanent Sufi traditions add further depth to literary visions of humans and animals as fellow creatures, struggling together upon the land's harsh contours, and through its centuries of colonisation and war. I therefore expand Pick's notions of 'creaturely attention' and 'creaturely history' through the spiritual and epistemological contexts of Libya, its harsh geography and brutal history. As a field concerned with animals as the 'limit case for theories of difference, otherness and power', it is certainly imperative that animal studies moves into such marginal contexts, and explores the kind of attention extended to creatures within them, countering suggestions that concern for 'animal victims' is limited to the rich West.[77]

[75] Ibid., 18.

[76] Ibid., 185-6.

[77] Marion Scholtmeijer, *Animal Victims in Modern Fiction: From Sanctity to Sacrifice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 300; Kari Weil, *Thinking Animals: Why Animal Studies Now?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5.

Nation and Other Worlds: Writing Libya's History

The land now known as Libya has experienced a long list of foreign rulers, from the Phoenicians in the fifth century BCE, to the Ottoman Empire in 1517, and, nearly four centuries later, Italy in 1911, aiming to establish its glorious 'Fourth Shore' (Quarta Sponda) on the other side of the Mediterranean. Historian Dirk Vandewalle expresses how the ensuing period of colonisation (1911-1943) left the land's mainly nomadic inhabitants with a sour first impression of the modern nation-state, under which they had experienced only political exclusion and brutal subjugation.[78] The period, though brief, was 'exceptionally brutal and bloody', and left a deep sense of distrust towards the West in general.[79]

In addition, powerful regional and tribal identities continued to outweigh national ones, even after Independence. Following World War Two, in which Italy was ousted from the land, the historically disparate regions of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan were brought together by the UN in 1951, and Independence granted to the United Kingdom of Libya. Exploring the years leading to Independence, Anna Baldinetti sums up the process as what she explicitly terms the 'failure of an imagined community', due, in her opinion, to the continuing power of tribal identities, and the agency of external powers – Britain, France, America and the region's exiled intellectual elite – rather than local political force.[80]

Issues of national versus regional identity were further compounded by the reign of the first monarch Idrīs al-Sanūsī, who proved reluctant to govern beyond his native Cyrenaica, yet also banned other political parties in 1952. After eighteen lacklustre

[78] Dirk Vandewalle, *A History of Modern Libya* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012), 3.
[79] Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, 'Libya, Social Origins of Dictatorship, and the Challenge for Democracy,' *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 3 (2012): 71.
[80] Anna Baldinetti, *The Origins of the Libyan Nation: Colonial legacy, exile and the emergence of a new nation-state* (London: Routledge, 2010), 143.

years, Gaddafi's 1969 coup then led to the creation of the Libyan Arab Republic, followed, in 1977, by the newly named Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya (*al-Jamāhiriyya al-'Arabiyya al-Lībiyya al-Sha'biyya al-Ishtirākiyya al-'Aẓmā*). For over four decades, Gaddafi's tyrannical rule was characterised by what Vandewalle describes as a deliberate 'policy of statelessness'.[81] Curtailing both the administrative reach of the state, and the ability of the people to participate in any meaningful manner, Gaddafi made no attempt to lay the foundations for a lasting and stable nationhood. Instead, he fostered a 'cultural policy of Bedouinization', encouraging nostalgia for nomadic, tribal ways.[82] At the same time, he espoused a revolutionary rhetoric concerning the people's supposed self-governance, in a form of direct democracy outlined in his *Green Book* (1975; *al-Kitāb al-Akhḍar*). All the while, he terrorised the nation into silent fear and mutual suspicion. Commenting on his regime, Matar simply states: 'our national experience has been marked by shame, pain and fear'.[83]

It is certainly not the aim of my thesis to suggest statelessness as a defining feature of Libyan literature, a proposal that would defy the solidarity expressed by many authors towards one another and national identity. However, the creaturely poetics which I trace in their work does operate on levels that move beyond nation into meditations on the universal mechanisms of violence, suffering and victimisation. These levels vary from panoramic visions of history, stretching into the deep past, to daily struggles for survival, exploring the country's recent tragedies through its historical ones, and attending to both the human and animal victims of these tragedies.

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[81] Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 5.

[82] Ahmida, 'Libya, Social Origins,' 74.

[83] Hisham Matar, 'Gaddafi is gone. Long live unity, democracy and the rule of law,' *The Guardian*, August 22, 2011, accessed June 15, 2016, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/22/libya-gaddafi-tripoli-hisham-matar.

Given the country's formerly nomadic population, humans and animals were, indeed, often caught together in the midst of political antagonisms. Such is conveyed in Aḥmad al-Faytūrī's (b. 1955) *Sarīb* (2001; *A Long Story*),[84] in which the narrator's Berber grandmother describes the brutality of concentration camps, used by Fascist Italy to quash nomadic rebellions in the 1930s:

> They told me that that Italian, Graziani, the governor of Cyrenaica, had packed the tribes in there, row on row, from Tobruk to Abyar (*raṣṣ fihi al-qabā'il al-barqāwiyya raṣṣan*). Them, their camels and goats, with no water, food or protection from the burning sun and bitter night wind.[85]

The grandmother's reference to the Eastern tribes of Cyrenaica being 'packed [...] row on row', employing language typically associated with animals, echoes how these camps have elsewhere been described. Geographer David Atkinson describes how the land's nomadic peoples were 'dehumanised, excluded and persecuted'.[86] At the same time, the grandmother's reference is also entangled with her other remark that the people were imprisoned with their camels and goats, a historical fact echoed in all sources dealing with the camps. In total, 100,000 people and 600,000 livestock were interned, and human starvation was indelibly linked to that of animals, deprived of areas large enough to graze in.[87]

While people were 'dehumanised', they therefore also keenly felt the misery of their own animals, which had shared and allowed their formerly free and nomadic life. A poem by Rajab Buḥuwaysh al-Minifī, a famous oral poet and prisoner of 'Aqīla, laments,

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[84] '*Sarīb*', a term from Libyan dialect, signifies an overly-long, fragmented and rambling story.
[85] Aḥmad al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-'Arabiyya), 41-42.
[86] David Atkinson, 'Encountering Bare Life in Italian Libya and Colonial Amnesia in Agamben,' in *Critical Connections: Agamben and Colonialism*, ed. Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP), 155.
[87] Atkinson, 'Encountering Bare Life,' 163; Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices: Power and Agency in Colonial and Postcolonial Libya* (London: Routledge, 2005), 44-45.

among a list of other torments, the emaciation and loss of a beloved camel.[88] Similar visions can also be seen in broader Libyan fiction, from memories of World War Two, in which coastal cities were heavily bombed and left in the grip of drought, famine and contagion, to oblique references to Gaddafi. In these visions, animals become not only symbolic of human suffering, but sharers in it.

Entwined in the historical and political, meanwhile, is the environmental, with Libya's vast desert and ecologically diverse coastline heavily impacted by warfare, urbanization and modern technology. Oil, first and foremost, represents a major factor contributing to the nation's turbulent and, in many ways, passive experience of statehood. From its inception, Libya was bolstered by foreign aid and later by foreign trade, with its main form of pre-oil income coming from renting military bases to the USA and Britain. Following the discovery of commercially viable quantities of oil in 1959, it was then thrust into the global market, and, during Gaddafi's regime, simultaneously came to be regarded as a 'rentier' and 'rogue' state. Thanks to the substantial revenues that oil brought, Gaddafi was able to pursue extravagant, wasteful and harmful policies that prevented sustainable growth within the country, and set it at odds with fellow Arab nations, sub-Saharan Africa and the West.[89]

The country's mainly arid geography and unpredictable climate further rendered it difficult to build stable industries beyond oil. Most citizens survived on government handouts or languished in nominal bureaucratic positions, while the country as a whole relied almost entirely on foreign imports of food. In the space of a few decades, under the joint forces of colonialism, dictatorship and globalisation, the country transformed from a nomadic land to one dominated by cities on the coast, with rapid

[88] For a translation of this poem in French see Kamal Ben Hameda, *Le livre du camp d'Aguila* (Tunis: Éditions Elyzad, 2014), 38. For an English translation see Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*, 52.
[89] Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 252

urbanisation compounding a sense of fracture within identity and community. Al-Faqīh, amongst many other writers, describes this rapid transformation as the driving concern of the country's early fiction, negotiating loss of tribal ways and changing identities.[90] While numerous aspects of Libya's nomadic past were critiqued, particularly its poverty and patriarchal tribal structures, nostalgia and displacement accompanied this.

With its history indelibly entwined in its geography, and its astonishingly rapid transformation from nomadism to urbanisation, environmental consciousness represents a major feature of Libyan fiction. Within this consciousness, animals evoke loss of traditional ties to the land, and critique of the policies that have destroyed them, consigning camels to the meat industry and introducing destructive technologies to desert and coast. In so doing, they bear out the words of historian and animal studies scholar Erica Fudge:

> It is in use – in the material relation with the animal – that representations must be grounded [...] a symbolic animal is only a symbol (and therefore to be understood within the study of iconography, poetics) unless it is related to the real.[91]

Combining the 'symbolic' and the 'real', through 'allegory' and 'encounter', animals in Libyan fiction track the suffering of the country's people, and, in a very literal way, the national and international forces acting upon their land, becoming expressive of both historical tragedy and future uncertainty. As Aida Bamia remarks, 'Most (Libyan) writers seemed torn between three worlds – the world they lived in, which was

[90] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, 'The Libyan Short Story,' (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 225.
[91] Erica Fudge, 'A Left-Handed Blow,' in *Representing Animals*, ed. Nigel Rothfels (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 7.

undergoing profound change, the Western, modern, industrialized world, and the world they dreamed of'.[92]

Drawing on Bamia's observation, animals may be identified as the dominant expression of what I term 'other worlds' in Libyan fiction, indelibly bound to the 'placelessness, homelessness or statelessness' engendered by tyrannical forms of power.[93] Becoming what Michel Foucault terms 'heterotopias' – counter sites where the real structures and systems found within a culture are 'represented, contested, and inverted' – animals, above all, emerge in visions of a land, and a way of being, unspoilt by the complications of occupation, oil and dictatorship.[94] These 'other worlds', characterised by simple struggle and bonds of affection, are, I argue, what distinguish Libyan fiction from broader Arabic fiction, expressive of its insularity under Gaddafi, and its rejection of the totalising discourses that dominated its political system for so long. As will be seen, the heroes and narrators of Libyan fiction who encounter 'other worlds' tend to be children, the elderly and outcasts, at odds with society, and often humanity. Through them, clashes with power are mapped onto encounters with animals, and I focus, in particular, on how they dramatise the motif of 'rite-of-passage manqué', in which human discourses and divisions are rejected, and the liminality of alternative, nonhuman forms of communality embraced. Through these charged encounters, 'other worlds' emerge, characterised by elusive spiritual insight, and entangled in the folkloric, Qur'ānic and Sufi traditions that have profoundly marked Libyan fiction.

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[92] Aida Bamia, 'The African Novel: Northern Africa,' *Encyclopedia of the Novel, volume one*, ed. Paul Schellinger (Chicago: Fitzroy Derborn, 1998), 25.

[93] Wen-chin Ouyang, *Poetics of Love in the Arabic Novel: Nation-state, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 66.

[94] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.

Libyan Fiction: A Brief Overview

Until the 2000s, only a few articles and books had been written on Libyan fiction, mostly by Libyan academics, journalists and authors.[95] Fatma al-Hagi, among others, points to the incredible dearth of criticism devoted to Libyan literature in both national and international scholarship.[96] In the 2000s, perhaps largely due to relaxed censorship and Libya's improved relations with the West, several more studies have been published.[97] In international scholarship, particular attention has been paid to al-Kūnī and Matar, though few studies have examined them in the context of other Libyan writers. Al-Nayhūm, despite his incredible influence, has been largely neglected.

Undoubtedly, this marginalization is, in large part, due to the country's political isolation, and the tyranny that has ruled over the cultural scene since 1969, with the few studies that have been published restricted by censorship to the same degree as the literature that they examined. It may also be attributable to the late development of Libyan fiction compared to its North African neighbours. In most studies, scholars indicate the centuries of warfare and poverty the country suffered as a reason for this late development.[98] The beginnings of written fiction are, meanwhile, generally traced

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[95] The most significant of these studies include: Samar Rūḥī al-Fayṣal, *Dirāsāt fī-l-riwāya al-lībiyya* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1983); Sulaymān Kashlāf, *Dirāsāt fī-l-qiṣṣa al-qaṣīra* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1979); and Bashīr al-Hāshimī, ed., *Khalfiyyāt al-qiṣṣa al-lībiyya al-qaṣīra* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1979).

[96] Fatma al-Hagi, 'The concept of time in five Libyan novels,' (PhD diss., Durham University, 2008), 10.

[97] Most prominently: Aḥmad al-Shaylābī, *Al-Qaḍāyā al-ijtimā'iyya fī-l-riwāya al-lībiyya* (Misrata: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Sha'b, 2003); Ethan Chorin, *Translating Libya: In Search of the Libyan Short Story* (London: Darf Publishers, 2015); and, following the collapse of the regime, Rita Sakr, ''Here It's Either Silence or Exile': The Story of 'Rats' that Rebelled in Libya,' in *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary Literatures and Political Geographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[98] See, for example: Kāmil al-Maqhūr, '*Ḥawl al-qiṣṣa al-lībiyya*,' in *Thalāth majmū'āt qiṣaṣiyya*, by Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh (Tripoli: Qiṭā' al-Kitāb wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1981), 55; and al-Hāshimī, ed., *Khalfiyyāt*, 22.

to the first appearance in 1935 of the journal *Lībīyā al-muṣawwara* (*Libya Illustrated*), in which Wahbī al-Būrī (1916-2010), considered the father of the Libyan short story, published his work. Following this, World War Two and the subsequent struggle for independence once again hindered development, and it was not until the 1950s that fiction began to flourish in earnest. As numerous critics comment, the dominant form was, without doubt, the short story, with the novel emerging primarily in the 1980s and 1990s.[99]

Fiction in the 1950s was marked by romanticism, moving swiftly towards social realism, broadly reflecting trends in wider Arabic fiction, though taking place several decades later and in a shorter space of time.[100] During this decade, which witnessed the country's Independence, and led to the discovery of commercially viable quantities of oil in 1959, poverty and social oppression were central concerns, and animals most prominently emerge as a form of escape. Such is illustrated in a story from the first ever published collection, *Nufūs ḥā'ira* (1952; *Lost Souls*), by 'Abd al-Qādir Abū Harrūs (dates unknown). In his '*Ẓilāl 'alā wajh malak*' ('Shadows on an Angel's Face'), the female protagonist longs to live like an animal in the forest:

> Jumping nimbly from branch to branch, swimming naked in the lakes and streams, free of any bonds, free of any inherited inhibitions, free to choose a love for herself from among the animals, and to live with him, to give her every passion, feeling and emotion, and her body.[101]

Another story from the same collection is also set in the forest, 'a dream-like land full of flowers, streams, colourful birds, gazelles', and, like the first, it illustrates how the

[99] Al-Faqīh, 'The Libyan Short Story,' v.
[100] Ibid., xi.
[101] Quoted in al-Faqīh, 'Libyan Short Story,' 104.

Libyan short story, from its first Romantic impulses, has employed animals to establish 'other worlds', escaping and critiquing social structures.[102]

Following these early movements, the 1960s represents what Khaled Mattawa describes as the 'golden age of Libyan literature', witnessing the emergence of a group of authors later referred to as the 'sixties' generation', whose work was marked by increasing literary experimentation.[103] A decade of both hope and anxiety, in which the effects of oil, modernisation and urbanisation were being assessed, the 1960s also concluded with Gaddafi's coup, dramatically changing the course of Libyan fiction. Many authors fell silent for decades, with some imprisoned and others retreating abroad, whether fleeing or sent on diplomatic missions. Almost all writers positioned themselves at either the centre or periphery of the 'anti-Qaddafi cultural and political imaginary'.[104] Some, such as al-Nayhūm, al-Kūnī and al-Faqīh, maintained precarious relationships with the regime, allowing them to continue writing. It is difficult to assess the extent of the danger they felt in doing so, although, undoubtedly, it was significant.

The 1970s and 1980s were undoubtedly the worst decades for literary censorship in the country, as, from 1973 to 1986, Gaddafi embarked on a number of catastrophic policies and oppressive measures as part of his Cultural Revolution (*al-Thawra al-Thaqāfiyya*), forcefully implementing the contradictory directives of the *Green Book*. In 1977, publishers and booksellers were combined into a single government-owned entity, and, soon after, the Writers' Union, and all other such organisations, became part of the Ministry of Culture. In fiction, authors delved deeper into the allegorical,

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Khaled Mattawa, 'Preface to the Libya issue of Words without Borders,' *Words without Borders*, July 2006, accessed May 17, 2016, http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/preface-to-the-libya-issue-of-words-without-borders-july-2006#ixzz48v1sS7db.

[104] Sakr, *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings*, 50.

creaturely and mystical, with mechanisms of direct, sovereign power coming increasingly under critique, and animals opening up 'other worlds' expressive of existential 'alienation' (*ightirāb*) and 'isolation' (*'uzla* or *waḥda*). As Chorin remarks, fiction also became increasingly veiled, with portrayal of specific places seeming to disappear almost entirely.[105] Libyan fiction of the 1970s and 1980s, he observes, is characterised by 'a kind of anodyne universe where allegory and alternate realities predominate'.[106] This universe, though often far from anodyne, is indeed a defining characteristic of Libyan fiction, offering alternative visions of reality, while remaining rooted in the material and creaturely. As Mattawa comments, 'Libyan authors have developed styles and literary strategies to produce a literature that is not directly confrontational, but that remains artistically rigorous'.[107] It is, he further comments, a literature that 'sees beyond the quotidian limitations imposed by a thoroughly corrupt and now only moderately repressive regime'.[108]

In 1988, meanwhile, an amnesty brought freedom for authors imprisoned in the late 1970s, while, in the 2000s, Gaddafi's attempts to repair his relations with the international community brought some relaxation in censorship. The situation nevertheless remained precarious until the final collapse of the regime in 2011, where I conclude my main analyses. The enormous changes the country has undergone in the ensuing years, and the fiction that has emerged during them, require studies of their own. I, meanwhile, focus on the animal 'other worlds' that emerged from the 1960s to 2011, and that, in many ways, capture the idiosyncrasies of Libyan fiction, conveyed by Bamia:

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[105] Chorin, *Translating Libya*, 4.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Mattawa, 'Preface to the Libya issue of Words without Borders,' *Words without Borders*, July 2006.

[108] Ibid.

> Libya occupies a marginal place both geographically and culturally between the Mashriq and the Maghrib. Sandwiched between those two regions, it is a little uncertain of its identity. Culturally, however, the Libyan novel is closer to the Mashriqī novel in both form and style. Yet it is distinguished by a special spirituality and symbolism. The style, on the other hand, is in line with the semi-sufi language launched by the Egyptian Jamāl al-Ghīṭānī in *Kitāb al-Tajalliyāt*.[109]

Bamia's observation that Libyan fiction appears to have closer parallels to Egypt and the Mashriq than to other North African countries is certainly worthy of further consideration. Here, however, I focus on how Libyan authors are specifically tied to one another through intriguing literary visions and aesthetics, which bring a strikingly different dimension to Arabic literature as a whole. While authors certainly indicate the influence of broader Arabic fiction on their work, and express allegiance with Arab identity, they undoubtedly refer to one another more. In the 1960s, through conferences and collaborative publications, a close community of authors formed, and appears to have lasted during the decades that followed, despite the imprisonment and exile of many. In autobiographies, literary criticism, blogs and fiction, authors cite, discuss and praise one another. Even al-Kūnī, whose status as a Libyan author is somewhat complicated by his Tuareg heritage, refers to his fellow writers throughout his three-volume autobiography, particularly indicating the influence of al-Nayhūm on him and other writers of the 1960s.[110]

The closeness of this community may certainly represent one factor behind the prominence of animals in so many authors' work. In a 1978 discussion between al-

[109] Bamia, 'The African Novel,' 25.

[110] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: rūḥ umam fī nazīf dhākira, al-juz' al-awwal* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2012), 177-185.

Nayhūm, al-Kūnī and others, al-Kūnī directly questions al-Nayhūm about what drew him to sustained portrayals of animal characters, following a tradition in which he incorporates Ovid's (43 BCE-17/18 AD) *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) and Ernest Hemingway's (1899-1961) *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951).[111] Alongside instances of direct influence, animals clearly also bring together both the 'symbolism' and 'special spirituality' that, for Bamia, set Libyan fiction apart. Having already discussed symbolism and allegory, I therefore look, in what follows, at the importance of folklore, the Qur'ān and Sufism. While representing significant influences on Arabic literature as a whole, in Libyan fiction these traditions are interwoven in particularly striking ways with the creaturely poetics of 'other worlds'.

Folkloric Animals

Given Libya's recent transformation from a nomadic and largely illiterate region, it is not surprising that folklore should have such an impact on its modern fiction, evident in short stories and novels, as well as anthologies of traditional tales, proverbs, poems and songs, many of them compiled by fiction writers. Most Libyan critics describe folklore as the country's principal literary heritage.[112] Author Kāmil al-Maqhūr (1935-2002), for example, compares the influence of the nation's oral tales to that of *Alf layla wa-layla* and the *maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī (969-1007) and al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122) on wider Arabic literature.[113] Many others have indicated the resonating influence of women, and specifically grandmothers, as the principal tellers of '*kharārīf*' (fantastic, folkloric tales).[114]

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[111] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār ma'a al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1999), 32.
[112] Yūsuf al-Dalnasī, '*Adab al-qiṣṣa fī Lībiyā*,' in *Khalfiyyāt al-qiṣṣa al-lībiyya al-qaṣīra*, ed. Bashīr al-Hāshimī (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1979), 177.
[113] al-Maqhūr, '*Ḥawl al-qiṣṣa al-lībiyya*,' 136.
[114] Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Aqīla, *Kharārīf Lībiyya* (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfah al-'Āmm, 2008), 28-9; Muḥammad al-Misallātī, *Layl al-jaddāt* (Tripoli: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Ām, 2008), 7.

Representing a remembrance and celebration of nomadic ways, and, consequently, of traditional connections with the land, folklore is indelibly tied to the presence of animals in Libyan literature. As author ʻAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī (b. 1926) notes, Libyan folklore is packed with animal characters, due to its close connection ʻwith the earth (*al-turba*) and the environment (*al-bīʾa*)'.[115] As folklore migrates into written fiction, so too does this close relationship, albeit tinged with regret for its subsequent loss. In much modern fiction, animals combine a hybrid mix of anthropomorphic folk characteristics and realistic detail, with the one evoking nostalgia for past literary traditions, and the other for past lifestyles.

In addition, folklore, partly at least, lies behind the positive morality so often conferred on animals in literature. In Libyan folklore, author Sālim al-ʻAbbār (dates unknown) indicates how ʻhumiliation' (*ihāna*) and ʻalienation' (*ghurba*) are consistently attached to the human condition, while animals emerge as morally superior, demonstrating a loss of dignity due to centuries of ʻdespotism' (*istibdād*) and ʻhuman tragedy' (*maʾsāt al-insān*).[116] In modern Libyan fiction, human brutality and alienation are similarly contrasted to peaceable animals, or to rebellious alliances between human and animal. Many authors also draw on more general folkloric motifs, inverting hierarchies of big and small, powerful and powerless, to grant victory to the underdog. Consistently, however, such provocative inversions are also tied into spiritual and cosmological discourses, whether Qur'ānic or Sufi, bringing anthropocentrism, the most fundamental of all hierarchies, into question.

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[115] ʻAlī Mūṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, *Al-Mujtamaʻ al-lībī min khilāl amthālihi al-shaʻbiyya* (Tripoli: Dār Maktabat al-Fikr, 1962), 35.

[116] Sālim al-ʻAbbār, *Maqālāt fī-l-turāth al-shaʻbī* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-ʻĀmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʻ wa-l-Iʻlān, 1982), 93, 97.

Under both Idrīs al-Sanūsī and Gaddafi, Islam was institutionalised as 'a factor of political legitimization' within Libya, and, as in most Muslim majority countries, employed as a means of building national identity.[117] Compulsory free education of Islam and Arabic was introduced, and numerous Qur'ānic schools opened. Many Libyan writers portray these schools in a negative light, as patriarchal, proscriptive and productive of harmful, superstitious beliefs. At the same time, much Libyan fiction is also characterised by a strongly Islamic impulse, producing counter-discourses to those officially propagated, and entwined with creaturely worlds. The Qur'ān, in particular, resonates powerfully in depictions of animals, and its influence may, quite simply, be attributed to its own striking and multifaceted portrayal of animals. Not only are seven *sūras* named after animals, and one after the jinn, but others point to various aspects of humanity, with one simply called '*al-Insān*' (The Human), and another, '*al-'Alaq*' (The Blood Clot), describing humanity's physical constitution. Through both, humanity is put into perspective as one species among many, within the wholeness of divine creation.

This same perspective is conveyed by reference to animals as 'nations like you' (*umamun amthālakum*) in verse 6:38. As Sarra Tlili observes, the verse does not specify in what way human and animal are alike, but does suggest animals' equal status within divine consideration.[118] Basing her broader examination of animals in the Qur'ān around the verse 'Of knowledge you have been given but a little' (17:85), Tlili argues that, although humans appear to be central, the Qur'ān is a decidedly theocentric rather than anthropocentric text. Within this theocentric world, animals differ from

[117] Baldinetti, *Origins of the Libyan Nation*, 144.

[118] Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 146.

humans, but are not necessarily inferior or less complex. While some are put at humans' disposal, ultimate authority lies with God.[119]

In Libyan fiction, verse 6:38, directly quoted by several authors, is paralleled in the 'other worlds' that I have discussed, and particularly in the way that they are often infused with a spirit of unity, transcending species.[120] Many authors, as will be seen, make reference to '*arḍ Allāh*' (the land of God), often alongside the adjective '*wāsi'a*' (wide), evoking other Qur'ānic verses (4:97, 29:56 and 39:10), and an overall spirit of ecological and spiritual unity. Within '*arḍ Allāh*', the 'human', rather than 'Libyan', is imagined as one creature among many, with all equally becoming *'ibād Allāh* (servants/creatures of God), whose mutual struggle for survival is productive of a particularly Qur'ānic 'proto-ethics'.

It remains to be said, however, that humanity often emerges as a force of destruction upon this unified land, characterised by '*ḥīla*' (wiliness), '*safk al-dimā"* (bloodshed) and '*waḥda*' (loneliness), signifying the cunning means through which it has dominated nature, and the lonelier and more complex sphere into which it has been cast. In many ways, this, too, echoes Tlili's examination of the Qur'ān, where she emphasises how humans are, among other attributes, characterised by '*ẓulm*' (oppression) and '*jahl*' (ignorance).[121] In response, animals, in Libyan fiction, often represent a positive way back into morality, and, to a large extent, this also reflects the spirit of the Qur'ān, and is often portrayed in reference to it. Tlili, for example, points to how animals engage with the divine in manners inaccessible to humans, indicating verse 17:44, in which animals are said to be in a perpetual state of '*tasbīḥ*', praising God in tongues that

[119] Ibid.

[120] Al-Faqīh, *Fi hijā' al-bashar*, 7; al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-Ḥajar*, 5.

[121] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 240.

humans cannot understand.[122] She also emphasises the central Qur'ānic concept of animals as '*āyāt*', 'signs' of divine creation, already discussed in reference to wider Arabic literature. Encouraging contemplation and humility, these '*āyāt*' form an important part of what, through further discussion of the Sufi turn in Libyan fiction, I term 'creaturely signs'.[123]

Sufi Animals

As Ferial Ghazoul convincingly argues, Sufism has exercised a great influence over modern North African fiction, leading her to suggest the recognition of a 'Sufi North African novel', comparable to Latin American 'magical realism' and Soviet Russian 'socialist realism'.[124] Libyan fiction is certainly no exception. Sufi *zawāyā* (lodges), housing different brotherhoods, have been present in the region for centuries, with the Sanūsiyya order dominating much of the Sahara since the mid-nineteenth century. Known for its strongly ascetic rigour, and revivalist impulse, the order also gave Libya its first monarch in the form of Idrīs al-Sanūsī.

In modern fiction, Sufism, in both its popular and classical branches, finds varied expression, most commonly emerging, like the Qur'ān, as a way of imagining alternative visions of community, distanced from political and social oppression. In many respects, this is in keeping with the role of Sufism in broader Arabic literature, where it has often emerged as an expression of disillusionment with political ideologies, providing compensatory visions of revolution or simply worldly renunciation. As Ziad Elmarsafy indicates, however, 'There is far more to the Sufi turn

[122] Ibid., x, 166.
[123] Ibid., 153.
[124] Ferial Ghazoul, '*al-Riwāya al-ṣūfiyya fī-l-adab al-maghāribī*,' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 17 (1997): 28.

in contemporary Arabic fiction than a reaction to living in an age of injustice and corruption'.[125]

For Elmarsafy, 'Sufi themes and topoi enable key meditations on individuality, survival, hospitality, autobiography and, above all, the novel itself as a vector for ideas about the world and its habitability'.[126] To his list I add meditations on the creaturely and the ecological, emerging through visions of the central Sufi concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness-of-being), signifying how all of visible reality is derived from one divine Truth. Through this concept, a communion of beings is imagined, gravitating from 'other worlds' into a holistically unified world. Above all, the concept emerges as a 'relational epistemology', a term applied by Wendy Woodward to the indigenous traditions of southern African literature, establishing heterarchical forms of kinship between human and animal.[127]

In Sufi tradition, animals have certainly historically provided a means for humans to perceive their place within a unity-of-being. In the thought of renowned Sufi thinker Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240), William Chittick, for example, examines how animals are presented as creatures deserving of their 'right' (*haqq*) to the same extent as humans.[128] Pasha Khan, meanwhile, explores how animals are presented as having a relationship to divine knowledge free from the shackles of 'reason' (*'aql*) that can aid humans in their own journey towards it.[129] This is also reflected in mystical practice, in which some brotherhoods encourage the temporary embrace of animal existence and, as Ali

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[125] Ziad Elmarsafy, *Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 11.
[126] Ibid., 8.
[127] Woodward, *Animal Gaze*, 3-4.
[128] William Chittick, 'The Wisdom of Animals,' *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 46 (2009), accessed April 26, 2016, http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/wisdom-of-animals.html.
[129] Pasha Khan, 'Nothing but Animals: The Hierarchy of Creatures in the *Ringstones of Wisdom*,' *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 43 (2008), accessed April 26, 2016. http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/nothing-but-animals.html.

Asani remarks, the ability to listen to and understand birds and beasts is a 'sign of the spiritual adept'.[130]

In Libyan fiction, animals most often connect humans to visions of oneness not through transcendental experience but through immanent evocations of the material vulnerability shared by all. In one of al-Kūnī's novels, for example, a character remarks that 'it was the Maghreb that had brought Sufism down from its throne of heavenly philosophy (*'arsh al-falsafa al-samāwiyya*), to the common soil of everyday life (*arḍ al-ḥayāt al-yawmiyya*)'.[131] This observation is reflected in wider Libyan fiction, in which visions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* are imagined on an often uncomfortably organic level through entangled visions of human and animal flesh. Becoming mediators between *''ālam al-shahāda*' (the seen world) and *''ālam al-ghayb*' (the unseen world of divine revelation), the two planes of being central to Islamic cosmology, animals convey spiritual insight through the most fundamental facts of shared physicality and suffering. In other words, Sufism, as it emerges in Libyan fiction, dispels what Pick, drawing on philosopher Cora Diamond, describes as 'comfort-thinking' in which the body is perceived '*with* consolatory illusions'.[132] Combining 'unforgiving materiality' and 'sacred vocabulary', animals represent what, drawing on the Qur'ānic notion of *āya* and the Sufi notion of *sirr* (secret, esoteric knowledge), might be termed 'creaturely signs', leading humans away from society and into alternative zones of reflection, grounded in the most fundamental truths of physicality. These 'creaturely signs', in conjunction with animals' symbolic uses, represent one of my first focuses, elaborated fully in what follows.

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[130] Ali Asani, ''Oh that I could be a bird and fly, I would rush to the beloved': Birds in Islamic Mystical Poetry,' in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Kimberley Patton and Paul Waldau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 171.

[131] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 106; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 130.

[132] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 185-186.

Thesis Structure and Scope

Before elaborating the structure and scope of my thesis, it is worth flagging various difficulties that I have encountered in the study of Libyan fiction, and the limitations imposed on my work. Firstly, given the small amount of research on the literature, and the inaccessibility of the country due to current political circumstances, acquiring copies of authors' work and biographical information about them has occasionally been a challenge. In particular, I have been unable to access newspapers published in the 1960s, in which many prominent authors began to publish. Secondly, tracking the chronology of when works were first written and published has also proved difficult given the decades in which publishing was impossible for many authors. Similarly, understanding why some books were censored and others not has also presented a challenge, again due to lack of existing research and, indeed, the difficulty of conducting such research now that the Gaddafi regime is no more. With that said, several recent ventures have also greatly facilitated the research process, most prominently the efforts of publishing houses Darf and Tāla. The first of these is a London-based branch of famous Libyan publishing house Dār Firjiyānī, and has generously provided me with books. The second, through the editorial efforts of writer and historian Sālim al-Kubtī, has reprinted many of al-Nayhūm's most prominent articles and letters, as well as material written about him.

In my own work, I provide a broad overview of Libyan fiction, compensating for a lack of existing scholarship, while also focussing on particularly prominent writers. Evidently, I cannot embark on a comprehensive investigation of all writers, and my choice of who to include has been driven by identifying sustained and nuanced depictions of animals. Within my analyses, I include both authors who remained within Libya during Gaddafi's regime and those who left. Furthermore, I discuss those who write in languages other than Arabic. In exploring how identities, whether regional,

Libyan or Arab, are transcended in creaturely poetics, as well as how this poetics is rooted in Libya's different histories, geographies and traditions, cultural and linguistic plurality can only enrich my analyses. Reflecting this diversity, al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī provide my main comparative focus, with the former a son of Benghazi, writing of coastal cities in satirical allegory, and the latter a Tuareg from the oases of the south, tending to spiritual reflection. Both authors represent the radically different ways in which animals are portrayed in Libyan fiction, as well as underlying elements that bring them together. Furthermore, their careers span the period in question, with al-Nayhūm first publishing in the mid-1960s, and al-Kūnī beginning in the mid-1970s, and still publishing today.

My choice of which animals to discuss, meanwhile, has been driven solely by what I have found in the literature. Some chapters are therefore based around a particular species, and others around a particular genre in which different animals appear.[133] Encompassing animals of all shapes and size, the overarching theme of each part of my thesis explores how these animals are involved in tracing crucial junctures in human existence, reflecting what John Berger elsewhere describes as 'the universal use of animal-signs for charting the experience of the world'.[134] With this in mind, my parts are structured around themes of childhood, survival and origins, with rites-of-passage and, more particularly, rites-of-passage 'manqué' prominent in each. As in my introduction, each part also begins with a Qur'ānic verse, providing a conceptual framework for what follows, and woven into 'other worlds' and Sufi-inspired visions of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.

[133] While figuring prominently in Islamic cosmology, jinn and angels have been omitted, requiring a study of their own, and certainly providing intriguing perspectives on the notion of a creaturely poetics encompassing both 'createdness' and materiality.

[134] John Berger, *Why Look at Animals?* (London: Penguin, 2009), 17.

In Part One, 'Growing-up: Rite-of-passage Manqué', I focus on depictions of childhood companionship with animals, and how they dramatise rites-of-passage manqué as children, in varying tones of scepticism and sadness, reject the discourses and practices imposed on animals by the adult world, tacitly refusing to grow into that world. From Qur'ān 16:79, I take the concept of '*āya*' (sign), and, alongside the Sufi '*sirr*' (secret), use it to explore how animal companions function as 'creaturely signs', pointing children to fault lines in society and returning them to 'other worlds' of alternative, simpler relationality. Overall, I explore how animals serve both as multifaceted symbols, critiquing social and political phenomena, and mystical 'signs', pointing beyond them to what remains elusively out of reach. Through this exploration, I focus on depictions of the difficulty of 'growing-up', and specifically of doing so in Libya, under the continuing influence of repressive traditions, and the impact of political oppression and war. Through these depictions, straightforward visions of nation and community are problematised, while elusiveness, mystery and human-animal companionship form compensatory 'other worlds'.

In Chapter One, 'Sheep Sacrificed: From Celebration to Sadness', I introduce al-Nayhūm's short stories about Eid al-Adha, and then continue to explore the theme of child and sheep in the work of other authors, where it forms a striking theme. In particular, I focus on how communal celebration of Eid shifts to the sadness, rebellion and mental illness of child narrators and protagonists, with depictions of slaughter, and the child's refusal to accept it, allegorising aspects of Libyan society. In Chapter Two, 'Flight Curtailed: Birdsong, Stories and Other Worlds', I move to images of birds trapped, both literally and in human discourse, and shift my exploration to critique of different epistemologies, concerning the movement of tradition into modernity, but also a deeper reflection on the very capacity of human language to convey Truth. Through physical encounter with birds, their flight, song and suffering, children

pursue alternative 'worlds' to those articulated by adults. These 'worlds' are, fundamentally, characterised by an embrace of the unintelligible, exemplified in the fiction of al-Kūnī with which I conclude the chapter, exploring how birds, and animals more broadly, represent immanent, mystical signs within his plural desert universe.

Part Two, 'Survival: The Collapse of Community and Call of the Creaturely', identifies the theme of subsistence survival at the heart of the Libyan imaginary, and moves from rite-of-passage manqué into lengthier explorations of the dilemmas of adulthood. As with fiction concerning childhood, the novels considered complicate straightforward visions of community and nation, and challenge human discourses, through the animals depicted within them. Exploring how conflicts over food and land are imposed on animals, and how animals transcend these conflicts, I focus on the visions of environmental and spiritual unity that emerge from them, encapsulated in the concept of *arḍ Allāh* (the Land of God). From Qur'ān 11:6, I take the concept of '*rizq*' (sustenance, divine bounty), drawing it into notions of 'creaturely attention' and *waḥdat al-wujūd* to explore this vision further. Meanwhile, through Foucault's concept of the literary heterotopia, I examine how this unified world is entangled with hybrid ethics and aesthetics, as animals, in startlingly diverse manners, answer back to human discourses, and destabilise them.

In Chapter Three, 'Beasts that Speak: Fables of Subsistence and the Crisis of Communities', I introduce groundbreaking novels from al-Faqīh, al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī, comparing and contrasting how these major texts in the development of Libyan fiction shift between animal fable and portrayal of 'real', silent and suffering animals. As with the encounters discussed in Part One, I explore how fable enunciates a simple ethics, contrasting the grand narratives of nation, and articulating a notion of the most fundamental attention and hospitality that must be extended to the 'other'. In Chapter Four, 'Silent Beasts: Spiritual Encounter, Creaturely Death and the Return to

Beginnings', I continue my examination of the same novels, focussing on their depictions of spiritual encounter mediated by animals, as well as paradigm-shifting moments of environmental transformation, destruction or renewal. Through both, human and animal are briefly joined, particularly in conjunction with water imagery, which, whether as rain, storm or sea, represents a means of rethinking species hierarchies within visions of divine agency and *arḍ Allāh*. In concluding this chapter, I also introduce three more 'survival narratives', considering how fault lines within society are explored and deconstructed in microcosmic form through the lives, and most particularly deaths, of individual animals within broader human dramas.

In Part Three, 'Origins: Human Forgetfulness and Animal Reminders', I move from rite-of-passage manqué and subsistence survival to visions of a lost and forgotten harmony, emerging through the interweaving of history with geological deep time and myths of creation and fall. From Qur'ān 20:30, I take the term '*ṭurāb*' (clay/dust), indicating the stuff of which humans are made, and link it to Pick's 'creaturely history', exploring how visions of the past are characterised by a focus on fragmentation, vulnerability and loss. Animals, again, figure prominently in these visions, as both the 'self' that humanity has theoretically left behind, and the 'other' that has witnessed its 'ascent'. Through both, I explore how the history of nation and humanity is profoundly unsettled, and how the origins of human discord are sought.

In Chapter Five, 'The Ape within, the Ape without: Primate Fiction and the Blame Game', I consider 'evolutionary allegory' in the work of al-Nayhūm, and how its ontological dimensions are intertwined in the political, continuing my analyses through monkey tales by other authors. In all, I examine how authors trace the origins of alienation and violence to different points within human evolution, and portray their continuing influence in modern society. In Chapter Six, '"Bonds, ancient and inscrutable": Human History through Other Eyes', I shift my focus from evolution to

myth, and how it is disrupted by the voices and perspectives of animals, interweaving fragmentary 'creaturely history' into accepted mythic and historical paradigms. As in Part One, I explore these themes in the work of several different authors, before concluding with discussion of al-Kūnī whose emphasis on animals is entangled in that of the ancient, with both central to his focus on remembrance as a crucial epistemological and moral endeavour.

In my conclusion, I then sum up and expand on the above through al-Kūnī's celebrated novel *al-Tibr* (1989; *Gold Dust*, trans. Elliott Colla), in which themes of 'growing-up', 'survival' and 'origins' are encapsulated in the central man-camel companionship. Through this tripartite approach, moving from rite-of-passage manqué to survival to origins, the defining characteristics of Libyan fiction become clear, with animals serving as signs at every stage. In many ways, through the different themes and aesthetics explored, Libyan fiction resists the construction of all stable visions of nation, whether utopic or dystopic. Instead, it dwells in wistful longing for 'other worlds', expressing what has been forgotten and cannot be regained, as well as the vulnerability of all within the current state of reality. At stake, more broadly, is the nature-culture divide, with the destructiveness, alienation and heedlessness of the human condition juxtaposed to the elusive call of animals. Through this elusiveness and 'otherness', Libyan fiction introduces new perspectives into an understanding of both Arabic literature and animal studies, upsetting straightforward notions of political and national allegory, and exploring intriguing, creaturely continuities between human and animal conditions.

Part 1 – Growing-up: Rite-of-passage Manqué

'*Have they not observed the birds, made subservient in the sphere of the sky, whom only God can control? In this are signs (ayāt) for a people of faith.*'[135]

I begin my thesis with the perspective of the child, so commonly linked in literature to that of the animal, with the young and the nonhuman forming innocent but powerful companionships. In contrast to the 'pet' and 'pony' tales of Western contexts, Libyan fiction takes me to Eid sheep, fattened up at home before their annual slaughter, and to birds, rescued from traps and cared for. Both types of encounter are intriguingly prevalent in Libyan fiction, conveyed in short stories and in fictional, and partly autobiographical, childhood memoirs. Through the child's sometimes sceptical and sometimes traumatised gaze, the encounters represent 'rites-of-passage manqué', in which creaturely vulnerability is embraced, rather than the traditions of human society. In tracking visions of innocence lost, and of failure to move beyond animal companionship and suffering, I explore how different aspects of Libyan society are allegorised and critiqued, from harmful superstitions to more abstract visions of brutality and oppression. The slaughter of sheep, in particular, evokes a sense of inexpressible violence and uncertainty, while birds hint at elusive 'other worlds' that children long for, and that reveal the inability of human language and logic to grasp them. Both encounters are tainted by sentiments of loss, an inability to accept the foundations upon which community and nation operate, and a search for alternative meaning and companionships.

Unpicking dimensions of allegory and encounter, I examine both sheep and birds as 'creaturely signs', with the meanings assigned them by society, and the practices

[135] Qur'ān 16:79, trans. Tarif Khalidi.

imposed on them, gradually effaced by the alternative, and often mystical, meanings the child perceives through them. Similarly, I explore how the specific human contexts allegorised through them open onto broader visions of shared suffering and creaturely reality. In this way, sheep and birds become multifaceted figures, while the child emerges as a particularly receptive reader of 'creaturely signs'. In much of the fiction that I discuss, the narrative perspective is that of a reminiscing adult, but the consciousness of the child takes over, responding in imaginative, critical and empathetic manners to the animal, and its predicament within human society. For this reason, I often simply refer in my analyses to the 'child' or 'boy' as the protagonist, rather than the adult narrator.

A Child's World: Growing-up Gone Wrong

Beyond the context of Libya, animals are widely present in fiction for and about children, and the innate connections between them have often been discussed. Environmentalist Paul Shepard describes his childhood infatuation with animals as 'a kind of miniature presentiment – that the human species emerged enacting, dreaming, and thinking animals and cannot be fully itself without them'.[136] George Maillet, meanwhile, explores the portrayal of animals in the children's poetry of Canadian Dennis Lee as a literary expression of the 'intuition of the coherence of being' and the 'one-ing of the world' that is characteristic of children's perceptions.[137] Other theorists have explored how such coherent visions are reflected in children's stories as a way of

[136] Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made us Human* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 4.
[137] George Maillet, 'Fear, Friendship, and Delight: The Appeal of Animals in the Children's Poetry of Dennis Lee,' in *Other Selves: Animals in the Canadian Literary Imagination*, ed. Janice Fiamengo (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 264.

helping them adapt to society as they grow, becoming aware of the disconnect between their expectations of harmony and justice, and the reality around them.[138]

In Libyan stories for children, a genre that many prominent authors have experimented with, animals are particularly steeped in values of justice, compassion and the basic responsibilities of one being towards another.[139] In the emerging nation of the 1960s, with its newly literate population, and burgeoning schools, printing presses and libraries, this morality emerged as part of a process of building national values.[140] While a source of nostalgia, oral tales, often terrifying and morally dubious, were rewritten so as to foster a sense of civic responsibility.[141] Animals, in different ways, became central to this. Drawing on the children's literature of Sālim al-Awjalī (b. 1961), author Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā (b. 1944), suggests that animals should provoke a spirit of rational curiosity, and remind children of the services which real animals render them.[142] In an article titled '*al-Qiṭṭa tuqaddim darsan fī-l-tarbiya*' ('The Cat's Lesson in Upbringing'), Yūsuf al-Sharīf (b. 1937), the most prominent writer of children's stories, even argues that animals embody natural behavioural traits that can be instructive to children.[143]

In adult fiction, meanwhile, depictions of child-animal companionships are marked by the disruption of an innocent morality, as animals, rather than helping children deal

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[138] See, for example: Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); André Favat, *Child and Tale: The Origins of Interest* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977).

[139] Yūsuf al-Sharīf (b. 1938) and Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā (b. 1944) are the most prominent of these authors. For a more comprehensive list, see Farīda al-Amīn al-Maṣrī, *Adab al-aṭfāl fī Lībiyā fī-l-niṣf al-thānī min al-qarn al-'ishrīn: dirāsa tārīkhiyya taḥlīliyya* (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2008).

[140] See Khalīfa Ḥusayn Muṣṭafā, *Al-Ḍiffa al-ukhrā: qirā'āt fī-l-adab al-lībī al-ḥadīth* (Tripoli: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Ām, 2008), 107-113.

[141] al-Maṣrī, *Adab al-aṭfāl*, 67.

[142] Ibid., 113.

[143] Yusūf al-Sharīf, '*Li-l-kibār: al-qiṭṭa yuqaddim darsan fī-l-tarbiya*,' *Scribd*, accessed April 29, 2016, https://www.scribd.com/doc/191779406/الحيوان-يعلم-الإنسان-القطة-تقدم-الدرس

with society, aggravate their feelings of alienation. In '*Madrasa qurb a'shāsh al-ṭuyūr*' (2000; 'A School near the Birds' Nests'), one of al-Awjalī's first adult short stories, for example, a boy rescues two chicks on his first day of school, only to see them thrown from the window by his teacher.[144] In this way, while stories *for* children optimistically envision what the nation might become, fiction *about* children, often by the same authors, cynically portrays what it fails to become, with the shattering of the child's hopes and affections by figures of power. Commenting on the Libyan short-story of the 1960s and 1970s, al-Faqīh observes how 'the father-character has become identified with all the suppression inflicted on the individual throughout his development, thus hindering his psychological development and blocking his emotional needs'.[145] In much fiction, 'suppression' is dramatised through doomed child-animal encounters, which also often provide the sole moments of respite from broader visions of trauma.

Hisham Matar's novel, *In the Country of Men* (2006), aptly demonstrates the trend that I examine: a narrative that appears to be a *Bildungsroman*, but that instead expresses profound cynicism towards 'the country of men', signifying, above all, Gaddafi's oppressive regime. In the novel, John Kearney notes trauma as a defining feature, linking it to the 'difficulty of imagining a "better reality"'.[146] Amongst expressions of trauma, however, the novel does have occasional moments of reprieve, as when Suleiman, the protagonist, encounters the cows his father has imported from Scotland: 'I spent the whole of that day unable to leave them alone, turning around the truck, looking up at their pink titties, climbing to stare into their peculiar eyes'.[147] Suleiman's mother and father join him in feeding and playing with the cows and, for a brief

[144] Sālim al-Awjalī, '*Madrasa qurb a'shāsh al-ṭuyūr*,' in *Shahwat al-sikin*, 37-41 (Misrata: Al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 2000).
[145] Al-Faqīh, 'The Libyan Short Story', 272.
[146] John Kearney, 'Traumatised Narrator's in Hisham Matar's novels,' *Journal of Literary Studies* 30, no. 3 (2014): 124.
[147] Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 30.

moment, the traumatic events of the wider novel, in both Suleiman's personal life and the country as a whole, are transcended. A childish ethics is expressed through Suleiman's father, 'making sure each cow got its share', and his mother singing to them.[148]

In this respect, caring for animals, or simply identifying with them, become proto-ethical acts, transcending more complex political and social circumstances. Together, child and animal become the sometimes sceptical, sometimes naïve, and sometimes rebellious 'other' to adult society, echoing the comments of Steve Baker:

> Received wisdom has it that the tendency to like, to care for and to identify with animals is essentially a childhood phenomenon, or, as it might often be more condescendingly expressed, a childish thing [...] This prejudice constructs the animal as absolutely other, and by association those who identify with the animal themselves come to be seen as other.[149]

In Libyan fiction, the child's 'other' perspective represents a nostalgic return to a time of greater innocence, an attempt to recapture that innocence, and an exploration of the processes through which it was lost. Encounters often also shift from childish visions of 'one-ing' to explicitly Sufi visions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity-of-being), with animals, as 'creaturely signs', conveying notions of both the Qur'ānic *āya* (sign of divine creation/wonder) and Sufi *sirr* (secret/esoteric knowledge/revelation). Through both, immanence and transcendence come together, as Stefan Sperl remarks of the *āya* in a discussion of Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's fiction:

> [...] nature and revelation are conjoined in the Arabic word *āya*, which means both 'verse' of the Qur'ān' and 'sign of divine power', among the most

[148] Ibid.

[149] Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 124.

> prominent of these signs are, as emphasised throughout the sacred text, the manifestations of the natural world.[150]

Representing manifestations of *al-shahāda* (the seen world), Libyan sheep and birds point to *al-ghayb* (the unseen world), which can never be fully grasped, provoking a sense of wonder and humility, reminiscent of Derrida's encounter with his cat:

> [...] in these moments of nakedness, under the gaze of the animal, everything can happen to me, I am like a child ready for the apocalypse, I am (following) the apocalypse itself that is to say the ultimate and first event of the end, the unveiling and the verdict.[151]

In children's encounters, visions of 'unveiling' lead both to traumatic realisations concerning society, its foundations and flaws, and wistful perceptions of lost unity, echoing the words of John Berger: 'Metaphor finds the traces which indicate that all is one. Acts of solidarity, compassion, self-sacrifice, generosity are all attempts to re-establish – or at least a refusal to forget – a once-known unity'.[152] Part One therefore tracks how a vision of lost unity emerges through violence to animals, encoding and critiquing particular social discourses and wider instances of political injustice.

In Chapter One, 'Sheep Sacrificed: From Celebration to Sadness', I begin with short stories for and about children by al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, before tracing the motif of the Eid sheep in the fiction of Khalīfa al-Fākhirī (1942-2001), Kamal Ben Hameda (b. 1954), Sālim al-Awjalī (b. 1961) and Najwā Bin Shatwān (b. 1970). Primarily, I consider how, in inverting the celebration of Eid from one of joyful communality to one of individual sadness, authors strip sacrifice and slaughter of sacred meaning, and infuse them

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[150] Stefan Sperl, '"The Lunar Eclipse": History, Myth and Magic in Ibrāhīm al-Kawnī's First Novel,' *Middle Eastern Literatures: incorporating Edebiyat* 9, no. 3 (2006): 254.

[151] Derrida, 'The Animal,' 381. See pages 27-8 of my introduction for further discussion of this.

[152] Berger, *Why Look*, 52.

instead with allegorical critique and alternative forms of spiritual insight. In Chapter Two, 'Flight Curtailed: Birdsong, Stories and Other Worlds', Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's portrayal of a Sheikh and his aging crane provides the conclusion to my initial depictions of children and birds in the fiction of Muḥammad al-Misallātī (b. 1949), Muḥammad al-Aṣfar (b. 1960) and 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl (b. 1961). Here, I explore how children, through physical encounters with birds, reassess the stories they are told about them, and the language in which these stories are told. In the process, I examine how fiction becomes elusive, pointing always beyond itself to an ungraspable meaning that transcends the violence of reality. In concluding, I bring together al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī's uses of symbol and sign, and explore how al-Kūnī's reading of al-Nayhūm informs an understanding of both their fiction, and of the 'creaturely signs' of Libyan fiction more broadly.

Chapter 1 – Sheep Sacrificed: From Celebration to Sadness

In Libya, as in Muslim communities throughout the world, Eid al-Adha (*ʻĪd al-aḍḥā*, the Feast of the Sacrifice) is a time for celebrating family, neighbourhood, nation, and Ummah. The sacrifice of sheep is circumscribed by belief in submission to the benevolence of the divine, echoing Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Ismāʻīl, and God's substitution of a 'mighty sacrifice' (*dhibḥ ʻaẓīm*) for him.[153] Performed by generations of followers, Eid al-Adha also concerns hospitality, as meat is divided amongst the poor. In both respects, the festival is a celebration and ritual sign, of the human's relationship with God and community. The Eid sheep represents the bonds tying them together, as well as those tying the present to the past, the current Islamic Ummah to the original one. While not explicitly termed an '*āya*' (sign) in the Qur'ān, sheep, the most common form of offering, are therefore a locus of spiritual meaning.

In the visions of Eid that I consider, however, the sheep as symbol of religious and communal cohesion is radically transformed in fiction that foregrounds the sadness and introversion of the children who witness it, and dwells on visceral descriptions of slaughter. As author Muḥammad al-ʻAmāmī (b. 1943) writes, almost all children from his generation were entrusted with an 'Eid sheep' (*kabsh al-ʻĪd*) in the months before the celebration, and tasked with raising it.[154] Given the country's poverty at the time, Eid was an extremely important event, and the one time meat was readily available. Yet, as al-ʻAmāmī suggests, he, and many others, remember only the trauma of witnessing a companion slaughtered. Fifty years later, he recalls the 'gleam of the sheep's confused gaze, seeking my help'.[155] Furthermore, he notes the theme within

[153] Qur'ān 37:107.

[154] Muḥammad ʻAqīla Al-ʻAmāmī, *Quṭʻān al-kalimāt al-muḍīʻa: ʻan al-ʻalāqa al-adabiyya bayn al-mubdiʻayn Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm wa-Khalīfa al-Fākhirī* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-ʻArabiyya, 2003), 48-51.

[155] Ibid.

poignant stories by both al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm (1937-1994) and Khalīfa al-Fākhirī (1942-2001)'.[156]

First emerging in Libyan fiction in the 1960s, the trope of the child and sheep has reappeared as recently as 2011, aptly conveying the processes by which animals deconstruct traditional symbol and become productive of 'other worlds'. The active campaigning against sacrificial slaughter that has animated parts of the Muslim community in the last fifty years is undoubtedly a broader context to it, concerning animal rights, wastage of meat and unnecessary expense for poor families.[157] Yet, while the fiction radically deconstructs the festival, most of it does not explicitly address these issues. As the child identifies with animal rather than community, the sheep's death becomes entwined in broader layers of allegory, alternative spirituality and a generalised concern for creaturely vulnerability.

I begin my discussion with al-Nayhūm whose symbolic deployment of the Eid sheep is unparalleled in wider Libyan fiction, multi-faceted and levelling specific critique at the practice of slaughter, the superstitious beliefs underlying it, and the waste of resources caused by it. I then examine Khalīfa al-Fākhirī's '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*' (1974; 'Season of Stories'), evoking human warfare through ritual slaughter in more abstract terms. Moving to a younger generation, I subsequently consider the explicit link between sacrificial slaughter and rite-of-passage in Kamal Ben Hameda's *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (2011; *Under the Tripoli Sky* trans. Adriana Hunter, 2014), before finally exploring the fundamental disintegration of ritual into creaturely flesh in Sālim al-Awjalī's (b. 1961) '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*' (2000; 'The Knife's Desire') and Najwā Bin Shatwān's (b. 1970) ''*Īd khāṭi*" (2008; 'Flawed Festival'). Through each work, I trace an increasing

[156] Ibid., 48.

[157] For an overview of these movements, see al-Hafiz Basheer Ahmad Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2007), 114-128; and Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 122.

movement into viscerality, as the child's identification with the sheep moves from that of companionship to that of obsession with shared physicality. To such viscerality, al-Nayhūm's witty and satirical use of symbolic sheep may seem a stark contrast. It is, however, also the first example of the motifs that have proved so lasting and so striking, as Eid moves from celebration to suffering, allegorising fractures within the nation, and within humanity.

A Nation through its Sheep

In terms of literary aesthetic and critical concerns, al-Nayhūm's oeuvre may be divided into distinct stages, before and after Gaddafi's rise to power. Use of symbolism, and of animals, continues through both, but transforms radically, as explored over the three parts of my thesis. The Eid sheep, a recurring preoccupation of his early work, provides a particularly striking introduction to his use of satire, and his witty combination of realism and the fantastic. In the period from 1965 to 1974, when he left Libya permanently, al-Nayhūm's sustained portraits of Eid sheep were defined by his close relationship with his Libyan readership, and deep involvement in depicting, critiquing and moulding social realities.

Born in 1937 in the Sūq al-Ḥashīsh district of Italian-colonised Benghazi, al-Nayhūm lived through one of the most turbulent periods of modern history.[158] With a childhood clouded by World War Two, in which Benghazi was heavily bombed, his adolescence saw the announcement of independence for Libya, while early adulthood brought the transformative effects of oil. Educated at the local mosque and primary school, he was

[158] Biographical details are taken from Suha Taji-Farouki's introductory overview of al-Nayhūm's life and work, as well as from collections of letters and testimonies from al-Nayhūm's friends and acquaintances that have been reprinted by Tāla Publishing House. See: Suha Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum: An Introduction to the Life and Works of a Contemporary Libyan Intellectual,' *The Maghreb Review* 25 (2000): 242-273; Sālim al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj: 'an al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm* (Beirut: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2001); and Sālim al-Kubtī, ed., *Nawāris al-shawq wa-l-ghurba: ba'ḍ min rasā'il al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm* (Beirut: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2002).

one of the first graduates in Arabic Language from the Libyan University in Benghazi, opened in 1955. Following this, he was appointed assistant teacher at the university, and received a scholarship to study abroad. He left Libya in 1963 to study in Munich and Cairo, before settling in Helsinki with his Finnish wife in 1966. After briefly returning to Libya in the early 1970s, he moved to Beirut in 1974 and then to Geneva, where he lived for the rest of his life, publishing only two more works of fiction, and dedicating himself instead to historical, social and religious critique. Throughout his career, his writing has been marked by great variety, alongside the strongly symbolic and satirical style developed in his earliest works.

In the 1960s, after abandoning his doctoral studies due to disagreements with Cairo University and the Libyan authorities funding him, al-Nayhūm dedicated himself to writing full-time for *al-Ḥaqīqa*, a pioneering independent Benghazi weekly, and later daily. Becoming the newspaper's long-distance commentator on Libyan society, al-Nayhūm published all his writing there from 1965-1972, including short stories, articles and even a serialised novel. He soon became wildly popular and people are said to have formed long queues in front of newspaper stands on the day his column appeared, while youth adopted his bohemian lifestyle and mimicked his satirical writing, free from the constraints of classical forms.[159] Eulogies to him continue to be penned by some of Libya's most prominent authors.[160] As Suha Taji-Farouki puts it, 'his writings were unique in their impact, and were indeed instrumental, according to some

[159] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*Ṣāḥib al-nufūdh*,' *al-Nāqid* 83 (1995): 46.

[160] Many of these have appeared online, see: Muḥammad al-Aṣfar, '*Fī dhikrā al-'ishrīn li-raḥīl al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm*,' *hunasotak*, November 15, 2014, accessed May 3, 2016, https://hunasotak.com/article/13236; Aḥmad al-Faytūrī, ''*An al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, al-hībī al-lībī alladhī kataba al-kitāb al-akhḍar, wa-'an kitābatihi*,' *Libya al-mostakbal*, October 27, 2015, accessed May 3, 2016, http://www.libya-al-mostakbal.org/news/clicked/82722; and Manṣūr Bushnāf, '*Bi-l-yusrā: min hunā ilā Makka*,' *Al-wasat*, February 2, 2014, accessed May 3, 2016, http://www.alwasat.ly/ar/news/kottab/2665/. See also the special issue of the journal *al-Nāqid* (no. 83) dedicated to al-Nayhūm in 1995, following his death.

assessments, in encouraging Libyans to read and to take an interest in literary matters'.[161]

As what might be termed Libya's first public intellectual, al-Nayhūm was at the forefront of not just journalism and literature but also social change. The beginning of his literary career closely coincided with the beginning of popular print media in the country, with his writing literally shaping the 'imagined community' of the Libyan nation. Just fourteen years after Independence, when a 94% illiteracy rate had been estimated in the country, al-Nayhūm found himself at the forefront of Benghazi's first paper, as well as its most pioneering and popular.[162] Despite living abroad, and being accused by some of writing with a 'tourist's mentality', his articles and stories were characterised by an urgent, intimate tone.[163] His first columns were, in fact, originally personal letters to *al-Haqīqa* editor, Rashād al-Hūnī, in which al-Nayhūm expresses longing for Benghazi, its 'hovels, crumbling streets and swampland'.[164]

Despite his longing for home, al-Nayhūm by no means romanticised it. Living abroad also gave him a sharpened perspective on the transformations the country was undergoing in the aftermath of the oil boom, and his writing for *al-Ḥaqīqa* became both a need and a duty, as he attempted to reconnect to a rapidly changing homeland and rescue it from harmful trends. While *al-Ḥaqīqa*, under the encouragement of the monarchy, was involved in actively promoting the 'Libyan personality', al-Nayhūm's portraits were comprehensively satirical.[165] His most famous caricatures, al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq and al-Ḥājja Um-Dallila, embody misguided piety and close-mindedness, while

[161] Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 247.
[162] Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 42.
[163] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 18.
[164] Sālim al-Kubtī, ed., *Nawāris al-shawq*, 93.
[165] Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 250.

the *fgi*,[166] a local religious leader, is portrayed as a charlatan, reaping the rewards of what al-Nayhūm calls '*mihnat al-fgi*' (the *fgi* profession).[167] While he largely avoided political critique, the *fgi* became the focus of al-Nayhūm's scathing attack on superstitious religious discourses, depicted as a form of disciplinary power, deploying invisible threats to cow people into obedience, and detracting from true faith:

> There is no heaven above our heads nor is there a Satan. There is nothing in this expansive earth but Allāh and humankind, and if our local *fgi* went to float about in space, he would find nothing to add to this list except an old rubbish can which the astronauts left on the moon [...] Satan does not creep around in the dark of night, nor secretly plot. Rather, he sprouts up in our own country like alfalfa, chatting to citizens in broad daylight on the streets and addressing them from the Libyan radio, the miserable newspapers and, occasionally, the pulpit of the mosque.[168]

Above all, al-Nayhūm was concerned with demystifying religion. In *al-Islām fī-l-asr* (1991; *Islam in Captivity*), a collection of his later writing, he describes what he terms '*al-mujtama' al-ghā'ib*' ('absent society'), radically rethinking the Qur'ānic concept of ''*ālam al-ghayb*' (the unseen world) to mean 'the future', rather than a mysterious zone which remains the sole domain of the learned and initiated.[169] For al-Nayhūm, an 'absent society' is driven solely by fear of *al-ghayb*, embodied in demons and divine punishment. Contrary to this, the simplest person should be able to understand the world rationally, and be driven by a desire to change the 'present' (*al-ḥāḍir*). In his

[166] The term *fgi* comes from the fuṣḥā '*faqīh*' (jurisprudent, expert of *fiqh*).
[167] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*al-'Īd min al-dākhil*,' in *Taḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2001), 192.
[168] Ibid., 186.
[169] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *al-Islām fī-l-asr* (London: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 1995), 81.

fiction, he often satirically portrays the manifestations of *al-ghayb*, literally depicting Benghazi as a city of ghouls and jinn.[170]

Considering al-Nayhūm's satirical stories from 1965 until 1972, which marked the closure of *al-Ḥaqīqa* by the Gaddafi regime, I focus on how the Eid sheep symbolises the squandering of the nation's future through harmful superstitions. In order to contextualise the motif, I first introduce his controversial article '*Man akala al-qiddīd?*' (1967; 'Who Ate the Jerky?'), in which al-Nayhūm's close relationship with his readership is particularly evident. I then move to an examination of ''*An al-'aẓm wa-rāqid al-rīḥ*'[171] ('Of the Bone and the Luckless'), from his first short story collection *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* (1969; *Some Children's Stories*), and '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*' (1970; 'A Request from Hājj Zarrūq'), from his later collection *Ṭaḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd* (1972; *Greetings*).[172] In the first story, the fallacies of society are revealed through satirical transformation of traditional children's tales, and, in the second, through the sceptical gaze of child and sheep. Through each, the sheep moves through different genres and guises, from symbol of excess to satirical 'sign' of *al-ghayb*, and, ultimately, companion, in an affectionate portrayal that resonates with later authors' work. Unlike theirs, however, it is bolstered by an elaborate symbolic framework, and, just as al-Nayhūm's readers would have followed the Eid sheep from week to week, so do I, concluding with the perspective of the child, through which the first glimmers of 'creaturely signs' can be traced.

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[170] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Ayna tadhhab hādhā al-masā'?*' in *Ṭaḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd*, 131-137.

[171] ''*An al-'aẓm wa-rāqid al-rīḥ*' is taken from the popular Libyan expression '*rāqid al-rīḥ yalqā al-'aẓm fī-l-karsh*' (the luckless finds bones in a stomach), and signifies how misfortune entails further misfortune.

[172] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Man akala al-qiddīd*,' in *al-Ramz fī-l-Qur'ān*, ed. Sālim al-Kubtī, 367-373 (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2008), 370; ''*An al-'aẓm wa-rāqid al-rīḥ*,' in *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*, 49-59; '*al-Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*,' in *Taḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd*, 97-104.

Salted Meat and Squandered Wealth

In '*Man akala al-qiddīd*', published shortly after Eid 1967, al-Nayhūm develops a sustained allegory between the dried meat uneaten at Eid and Libya's squandered wealth. Observing that the two and a half million Libyan pounds used to import sheep from Syria every year once represented twice the country's wealth, the 'salting' of this wealth becomes a recurring motif: 'The question is thus: "Who is eating the jerky? The state or the people?" I cannot volunteer a response, for fear of riling your anger, so sit tight on your sheepskins and let's think awhile longer'.[173] As typical of his articles, al-Nayhūm creates the impression of an almost physical proximity with his readers, launching questions at them, both rhetorical and direct, and referring to them numerous times as 'my predatory brothers' (*ikhwatī al-sibā'*).[174] Vivid scene-setting is further combined with amusing statistics. If lined up, he quips, the sheep slaughtered at Eid would reach from Benghazi to al-Bayḍā', two hundred kilometres away.[175] In their place, al-Nayhūm lists what else the money could buy: two hundred schools with blackboards and teachers; the cultivation of one hundred square kilometres of wasteland; or ten hospitals with staff and equipment.[176] Reminding his readers of the possibilities brought by the nation's newfound wealth, al-Nayhūm paints a utopian picture of how Libya might be, aiming, as with all his writing, to create grass-roots change. As his question – 'Who is eating the jerky? The state or the people?' – reveals, he was concerned with compelling the Libyan public to take responsibility for their future. The Eid sheep duly moved from sacrificial victim to symbol of the needless sacrifice of the nation's future.

[173] Al-Nayhūm, '*Man akala al-qiddīd*,' in *al-Ramz fī-l-Qur'ān*, 370.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid., 368.
[176] Ibid., 369-371.

‘*Man akala al-qiddīd*’ led to al-Nayhūm’s first clash with the religious elite in the form of the al-Sa‘īd Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī al-Sanūsī Islamic University in al-Bayḍā’, which publicly condemned him. This is unsurprising given that al-Nayhūm was questioning the very foundations of Eid slaughter at a time before many others were doing so. Emphasising that slaughter is not one of the pillars of Islam, he mocks the belief that it provides guaranteed entry to paradise, and establishes the motif of a ‘caravan’ of sheep, bearing their slaughterers to heaven’ (*al-qāfila al-mu‘idda li-ziyārat al-janna*).[177] With sheep literally becoming vehicles into the satirical world of *al-ghayb*, al-Nayhūm brings superstitions to life, making his readers confront the religious discourses ruling over them.

Undeterred by his formal condemnation, al-Nayhūm continued to return to the Eid sheep. Both ‘‘*An al-‘aẓm wa-rāqid al-rīḥ*’ and ‘*Rajā’ min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*’ give it a central place, and, in each, the sheep appears in radically different guises, revealing al-Nayhūm’s awareness of the need to present provocative ideas in innovative, enticing forms, as observed by author Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh:

> He knew how much people loved him and that their love gave him permission to be more daring and provocative. He stretched this permission to its limit, crossing minefields and knowing exactly where to put his foot [...] He was a great artist and, at the same time, a skilful player.[178]

Woolly Skins and Wrongdoers

In ‘‘*An al-‘aẓm wa-rāqid al-rīḥ*’,[179] the sheep appears only in the form of woolly skins, emptied of flesh, and devoid of the animal’s disruptive gaze. This so-called children’s

[177] Ibid., 367, 373.
[178] Al-Faqīh, ‘*Ṣāḥib al-nufūdh*,’ 46.
[179] Hence, ‘‘*An al-‘aẓm*’.

story portrays a satirical vision of Benghazi, where people masquerade as sheep, and sheep themselves disappear entirely. Opening with a pious disclaimer, referring to the powers of the 'unseen', all that follows is immediately put into satirical perspective: 'It is told – and *Allāh* is most knowledgeable of the unseen (*al-khafā'*) and most wise, most great and generous, most kind and merciful – that Satan was standing before the gates of Hell one day'.[180] Told from the perspective of Satan as he travels from Hell to Benghazi, the city, on the eve of Eid al-Adha, is depicted from above:

> People filled the mosques and streets while judges sat on rooftops watching for the new moon and old ladies moved between the saints' tombs, fulfilling vows left over from last year. 'This city stinks like a sheep's pen', Satan thought to himself as he flew overhead.[181]

Soon, Satan is engrossed in watching a domestic dispute as the porter, Mas'ūd Ibn Tufāḥa, is berated for having failed to purchase a sheep. The 'caravan' makes its appearance as his wife berates him for failing to keep up with their neighbours:

> I cannot bear to see that gammy-legged woman riding a glorious sheep down the straight path while I trudge on my own two feet. Get out! Do you want to make a laughing stock of me on Judgement Day Mas'ūd Ibn Tufāḥa?[182]

Fearing the neighbours' scorn, his wife orders him to steal a sheep as Satan watches in amused disbelief. Mas'ūd informs her that he already tried, but the sheep turned out to be a dog, disguised to con people out of money. He is then instructed to steal the neighbours' sheep and informs his wife that it too is a fake, and the neighbour has been

[180] Al-Nayhūm, *''An al-'aẓm,'* 49.
[181] Ibid., 51.
[182] Ibid., 53.

bleating all morning to keep up pretences. Finally, he is instructed to steal the sheep of the Qāḍī (judge), who would never dare to offer a counterfeit victim.

Mas'ūd agrees and his wife dresses him up as nothing other than an Eid sheep in order to smuggle him in, convincing the Qāḍī to buy her 'ewe' for half a dirham. The 'ewe' is then put in a pen with the Qāḍī's ram, and, sometime later, another woman enters the house for an illicit liaison with the Qāḍī. Seeing her, the ram, which Mas'ūd had intended to steal, reveals itself as her husband, disguised to catch the couple red-handed. The husband eventually agrees to take the Qāḍī's 'ewe' as recompense and, later, we learn that the liaison was a ploy by him and his wife to blackmail the Qāḍī out of his 'ewe' by luring him into adultery. The story ends as Mas'ūd stands at the gates of Hell, presumably having been sacrificed for Eid. Satan, witness to the whole escapade, is no longer laughing.

Drawing on the motif of disguise from traditional tales such as those of *Alf layla wa-layla*, in which, as Marzolph and van Leeuwen comment, it is 'a favorite device for the construction of plots and subplots', the story twists and turns in a catalogue of human vices.[183] With Mas'ūd consistently referred to simply as 'the ewe' (*al-na'ja*), the disguises further echo motifs of metamorphosis, also prominent in *Alf Layla*.[184] No magic is involved, however, and the characters transform into animals simply because of their desire to better their neighbours. The Eid sheep is, therefore, never an Eid sheep, but a façade, concealing sinister intentions beneath it. Woolly skin and symbolic surface become one, and beneath them lurk real wrongdoers, as, with each fake, another vice is unveiled in a catalogue of sins that overwhelms Satan: fraud; vanity; theft; adultery; hypocrisy; and extortion.

[183] Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Arabian Nights*, 540.
[184] Al-Nayhūm, ''*An al-'aẓm*,' 55.

Due to their cynical, satirical and violent nature, several critics have remarked that al-Nayhūm's *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* seem 'neither fit for children nor about children'.[185] The collection's title certainly suggests a naivety that belies the violence of the contents, and al-Faqīh suggests they were deliberately mislabelled to temper their political content.[186] While this seems a fair assessment, there is perhaps more to it, particularly given confusion over the collection's publication date, which was, in fact, before Gaddafi's takeover.[187] Although censorship was still an issue under the monarchy, al-Nayhūm was not afraid to confront the powers-that-be, as evident in '*Man akala al-qiddīd*'.

Beyond the context of censorship, ''*An al-'aẓm*' may instead be seen as an example of what Jack Zipes terms '*umfunktioniert*' in which the motifs of traditional tales are inverted in order to critique the values they traditionally propagate.[188] Alongside contemporary social issues, al-Nayhūm's story duly critiques the very supernatural beliefs which animate traditional tales. While arguing for the preservation of these tales, which he describes as 'all the things that old ladies know', he was concerned, above all, with moving beyond superstition, and, in all his stories, magic is synonymous with the morally suspect, and with harmful myths of all kinds.[189] Children, meanwhile, emerge as both the victims of these myths, and their principal critics. In this respect, it is certainly significant that al-Nayhūm dedicated *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* to his three-year-old son, Karīm, and that it was later republished in *Jīl wa-risāla* (*A Generation*

[185] Al-Faqīh, 'Libyan Short Story,' 142; Muṣṭafā, *al-Ḍiffa al-ukhrā*, 157.
[186] Al-Faqīh, '*Ṣāḥib al-nufūdh*,' 47.
[187] Al-Faqīh suggests the collection was published in 1972 ('Libyan Short Story,' 142), while Taji-Farouki indicates both 1969 and 1972 ('Sadiq Nayhum,' 256), and al-Kubtī proposes 1969 (*Ṭuruq*, 23). Al-Kubtī's date seems most likely given that al-Nayhūm dedicated the collection to 'citizen K. N. in his third year'. Karīm al-Nayhūm, his son, was born in 1966.
[188] Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012), 58.
[189] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Wa-l-ḥibr bi-l-majān*,' in *Ṭaḥiya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd*, 160.

and a Message), the magazine of the country's boy scouts movement.[190] In his later writing, *Islām ḍidd al-islām* (1991; *Islam against Islam*), in a chapter entitled '*al-Ṭifl al-masḥūr*' ('The Enchanted Child'), al-Nayhūm further discusses the need to rid education of teaching methods that brainwash, or 'enchant', children, and destroy their naturally questioning spirit.[191] *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* may be seen as a counter-discourse, tackling young minds and forcing them to confront systems of power in satirical guise.

Scepticism certainly also characterises al-Nayhūm's depictions of children, who are, by far, the most positively portrayed of his fictional characters. This is the case in '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*', where sheep and child are joined through their affectionate play and their response, both critical and bored, to adult discourses. The story, which represents the last sustained depiction of the Eid sheep that I have located in al-Nayhūm's work, moves from comic jerky and empty skins to creaturely companionship, channelled through the perspective of the child.

A Sceptical Child and Curious Companion

Recalling his childhood Eids, the narrator of '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*'[192] describes al-Nayhūm's odious stock character, al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq, on his annual 'bloody tour' (*jawlatuhu al-damawiyya*) of the neighbourhood, slaughtering sheep for different households. With his voice often slipping into that of his former self, the narrator depicts how every year he would lovingly devote his time to the sheep's 'raising' (*tarbiyatahu*) and 'care' (*al-'ināya bihi*), only to see the animal torn from him:

> I spent most of my time caring for him, pulling him behind me on Fridays to wash him in the sea, mixing him bran and steamed tea leaves, and skinning my

[190] Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 248.
[191] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Islām ḍidd al-Islām* (London: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 2000), 245.
[192] Hence, '*Rajā*".

> forehead teaching him to butt. Then, when we'd become friends and I could take him onto the street without a lead to play with the other children, Eid would come around again, and the Ḥājj would arrive to slaughter my friend and hang him upside down (*maqlūban ʻalā raʼsihi*).[193]

The annual slaughter of the narrator's sheep is described in gruesome detail, as he is forced to see 'his friends hung upside down by their skinned legs from the rafters (*aṣdiqāʼī al-muʻallaqīn min arjulihim al-maslūkha min al-saqīfa*)'.[194] The phrase 'upside down' (*maqlūban*) is repeated to convey the vicious circle, and eventually the narrator describes how he determined to defend his ovine companion, waiting to attack the Ḥājj behind their front door. After thwarting his attack, the Ḥājj deploys a familiar superstition to convince him to surrender the animal. His words are, however, rendered ridiculous by the fact, heavily emphasised, that both sheep and child are listening with incredulity and boredom:

> [...] and we listened to him together, the sheep and I [...] He swore on his son's life that when you rise from your grave on judgement day, your sheep will be waiting for you at the cemetery gates, to transport you to Paradise.
>
> Then, when the sheep got bored and went to look for tea leaves in the bin, the Ḥājj leaned in, tickling my ear with the tip of his moustache, and informed me that walking the straight path was like treading a razor blade and, without my sheep, would be wholly impossible.[195]

The child concludes that he will not enter Paradise if his sheep is the price to pay, further wondering how the slaughtered animals can serve as steeds when they are so

[193] Al-Nayhūm, '*Rajā*',' 97-8.
[194] Ibid., 98.
[195] Ibid., 99.

thoroughly butchered. They would, he concludes, have to 'slither on their gutted bellies, with no head, legs, liver or intestines'.[196] Disillusioned, the narrator recalls how he visited the tomb of Saint Rifā'ī and left five piasters to ensure the Ḥājj's transformation into a stone. The next day, the Ḥājj dies and, in a dream, the narrator describes how he saw him refused entry to paradise because his butchered sheep could not transport him. Spotting the child, the Ḥājj orders him to procure the 'spare parts' and the narrator recalls how he woke to find an actual list under his pillow, showing it to his friends, and causing great mirth. In this way, the story, like '*An al-'aẓm*', employs fantastic motifs to satirical effect as the Ḥājj's superstitious discourses are turned against him. Going from house to house like a bloodthirsty ogre with a bag of skins, its stench announcing his arrival in advance, he encounters the logic of the child who, ironically, then manipulates other forms of superstition to defeat him.

The sheep, meanwhile, represents a playful narrative presence, described as a 'good-hearted creature' (*al-makhlūq al-ṭayyib al-qalb*), watching events 'with curiosity' (*bi-fuḍūl*), and seeking only play and food. With his naivety contrasting the Ḥājj's self-serving agenda, and his playful presence contrasting the stinking bag of skins, the sheep reveals the mercenary impulse behind the whole 'bloody tour'.[197] Against this, the sadness and tears of the child embody simpler desires, to care for his sheep and forge friendships with them. Significantly, '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*' was also written three weeks before Eid 1970, suggesting that al-Nayhūm intended to make his readers look differently at the very sheep they were fattening up at home.

With artfully crafted and timed writing, al-Nayhūm thus plays on his readers' social and literary experiences, combining Libyan realities with elements of the fantastic, and satirising superstitious beliefs from within. In all his work, he similarly controls and

[196] Ibid., 100.
[197] Ibid., 98-99.

manipulates symbol and imagery in order to communicate ideas to his readers in precise and appealing ways. In *al-Kalima wa-l-ṣūra* (1966; *Word and Image*), a work of literary criticism, he defines literary talent as the ability to convey a particular 'impression' (*inṭibāʿ*) to the reader by means of textual 'images' (*ṣuwar*).[198] His dedicated weekly readership enabled him to do so to a great extent, developing allusion, symbol and satire based in Libyan realities, and whose nuances his readers followed from week to week. The sheep exemplifies this experimental practice. Shifting from jerky to phantom mount, playful companion and slaughter victim, it represents a passive and unquestioned 'sign' of religious practise – trotting meekly down the 'straight path' – reassembled in different satirical portraits. Ultimately, the animal's gaze, a 'curious' one, and its physicality, expressed both in its desire for tea leaves and its slaughter, are deployed to send humans back to their 'circular codes'.[199]

According to author Aḥmad al-Faytūrī, al-Nayhūm's writing had its desired effect, as his readers 'repeated his sentences like maxims' and treated his works like 'riddles' to be solved.[200] Despite this, al-Nayhūm continued to express his disillusionment and sense of failure, sometimes through evoking pity for the Eid sheep, and even identification with it:

> I boarded the train and lay down like a dead fish, deciding I should dry myself in salt so that even if I was unable to change the world, the world would be unable to change me too. The Eid sheep and I would thus be dried out together.[201]

Alongside his social activism, themes of alienation are present in al-Nayhūm's work from the first, and children and animals often represent an antidote, conveying an

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[198] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Al-Kalima wa-l-ṣūra* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 2003), 23.
[199] Baudrillard, 'The Animals: Territory and Metamorphosis,' 137-8.
[200] Aḥmad al-Faytūrī, '*Najm al-nujūm: al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm*,' *Libya Watanona*, May 12, 2009, accessed May 4, 2016, http://www.libya-watanona.com/adab/ahmedf/af12059a.htm.
[201] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Tajrīb*,' in *Kalimāt al-ḥaqq al-qawiyya* (al-Māyā: Tāla li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr), 111.

innocence and affection lacking among adults, and productive of harmonious 'other worlds'. Despite emphasising the need for Libyan people to assume responsibility, and literally urging the abandonment of childish and animal instincts, both are infused with wisdom in his fiction.[202] This will be further analysed in Part Two, in terms of what al-Nayhūm, in an interview with Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, refers to as a spirit of 'naïve Sufism' (*al-ṣūfiyya al-bulahā'*) that underlies his work, infused with the concept of universal 'love' (*ḥubb*).[203] Arguably, this naïve Sufism underlies his portrayal of boy and sheep, whose creaturely companionship is no doubt based in al-Nayhūm's own boyhood memories.[204]

In the following fiction, I examine how the sheep as 'sign' shifts into different forms of creaturely identification and Sufi reflection. None represent the sustained and specific critique of al-Nayhūm's sheep, but embody more general meditations on violence and mortality. Nevertheless, many of the motifs discussed in '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*' remain, from companionship, care and feeding of the sheep to visceral descriptions of its slaughter, the suffering and sadness of its gaze, and, finally, the callousness of the adult butcher.

Sheep and Soldiers: From Ritual Slaughter to Inevitable War

Khalīfa al-Fākhirī (1942-2001), like al-Nayhūm, is from the 'sixties generation'. Without the activist impulse of al-Nayhūm's writing, his fiction is characterised by darker and more sustained expressions of existential angst, alongside more explicitly Sufi visions. Exploring parallels between them, al-'Amāmī describes al-Nayhūm's writing as

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[202] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Islām fī-l-asr*, 109.

[203] Al-Kubtī, *Ṭuruq*, 322.

[204] This is further suggested by an anecdote written about him after his death. In it, al-Nayhūm's childhood friend, Aḥmad al-Qalāl, reveals that al-Nayhūm was weaned on sheep's milk after his mother's early death. In remembrance of this, his father kept the sheep's skin for him, and he would sit on it and recall his bond with the animal. See Aḥmad al-Qalāl, '*Mawsū'a fī-rajul*,' in al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj*, 61-68.

characterised by '*al-mulhāt*' (comedy, farce) and that of al-Fākhirī by '*al-ma'sāt*' (tragedy).[205] Expanding on this observation through their depictions of Eid slaughter, he further suggests that al-Nayḥum's sheep provokes laughter, and al-Fākhirī's tears.[206] Indeed, the memories relayed by al-Fākhirī's narrator are infused not with witty scepticism, but a profounder sense of trauma, with the sheep's suffering linked to more fundamental expressions of human suffering. Like al-Nayhūm, al-Fākhirī draws on the conventions of the traditional tale to do so in '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*' (1974; '*Season of Tales*'), but transforms the tale through emotion and personal experience, rather than satirical subversion.[207]

Despite these differences, al-Fākhirī was one of al-Nayhūm's best friends. Growing up with him in the Sūq al-Ḥashīsh district of Benghazi, the two became close in adulthood and, after al-Nayhūm's departure, maintained a long correspondence. Like al-Nayhūm, al-Fākhirī published regularly in *al-Ḥaqīqa*, but, unlike him, remained in Benghazi for most of his life, working within administration.[208] In total, he published only three collections of short stories: *Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*, *Bay' al-rīḥ li-l-marākib* (1994; *Selling Wind to the Boats*) and *Ghurbat al-nahr* (1994; *The River's Solitude*).[209] As Khaled Mattawa remarks, his literary career was profoundly marked by Gaddafi's rise to power:

> Khalifa al-Fakhri, who had been one of the country's premier practitioners of the short story and one of the country's literary stars, almost stopped writing.

[205] Al-'Amāmī, *Quṭ'ān*, 20.
[206] Ibid., 51, 53.
[207] Khalīfa al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāṭ*,' in *Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*, 7-35 (Benghazi: Al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1994).
[208] Al-'Amāmī, *Quṭ'ān*, 18-20, 168.
[209] Khalīfa al-Fākhirī, *Bay' al-rīḥ li-l-marākib* (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1994); *Ghurbat al-nahr* (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1994).

> His publication record from 1967 to 1975 was more than two dozen stories. From 1975 to the time of his death in 2001, he published six stories.[210]

While occasionally satirical, solitude and alienation are the most prominent themes in al-Fākhirī's fiction, and his and al-Nayhūm's correspondence is marked by a similar tone, combined with expressions of frustration in the creative process, which they discussed and developed through one another.[211] In his eulogy to al-Nayhūm, al-Fākhirī describes how they would often write their articles for *al-Ḥaqīqa* together in his room in Benghazi, and recounts how al-Nayhūm would berate him for becoming too absorbed in themes of mortality.[212]

In '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāṭ*', contained in a collection by the same title, al-Fākhirī employs the open-endedness of traditional story-telling in his twenty-one short 'tales', combining a mixture of anecdotes, translations and reflections, some satirical and some sombre. As a whole, the collection conveys the impression of a dialogue, somewhat similar to al-Nayhūm's writing, though infused with emotion. In an opening extract, for example, al-Fākhirī explicitly frames the collection as a means of overcoming solitude, with the narrator, closely aligned to al-Fākhirī's authorial voice, describing himself as a 'creature' (*makhlūq*), alone in Room 211 of a Benghazi hotel: 'When the shiver comes to convulse your body, and you feel the burden of loneliness (*waḥda*), then and then only begins the season of tales'.[213] Transforming the paradigm of story-telling from a collective experience to one marked by '*waḥda*', al-Fākhirī, as al-Faqīh observes, adopts 'the role of the public storyteller', but also that of the angst-

[210] Mattawa, 'Preface to the Libya issue of Words Without Borders,' *Words without Borders*, July 2006.
[211] For the most important of this correspondence, see: al-Kubtī, ed. *Nawāris al-shawq wa-l-ghurba*, 21-89.
[212] Khalīfa al-Fākhirī, '*'Inā' al-kalimāt*,' in al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj*, 36.
[213] Al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsim*,' 8; trans. al-Faqīh, 'Libyan Short Story,' 148.

ridden intellectual.[214] His '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*' conveys both the fluidity of oral narrative and the depths of solitary contemplation.

While al-Faqīh describes the collection as 'an unconnected group of short articles and tales', there are also clear connections between them.[215] Tales seventeen, eighteen and nineteen are, for example, held together by the theme of the Eid sheep, introduced through the isolated statement 'This is Eid al-Adha' (*hādhā huwa 'īd al-aḍḥā*).[216] Continuing the narrative perspective introduced in Room 211, the tale is told through the voice of a reminiscing adult. Like al-Nayhūm's '*Rajā*", it depicts the 'care' (*'ināya*) the narrator gave to his sheep in the run-up to Eid, taking him to swim in the sea, and describing him following on his heels like a 'friendly puppy' (*jarw wadūd*).[217]

To an even greater extent than the companionship depicted in al-Nayhūm's '*Rajā*", al-Fākhirī's narrator emphasises his total absorption in the sheep, announcing: 'I gave him everything I had (*kull mā ladayya*), and carried him everywhere I went (*aynamā dhahabtu*)'.[218] In the background, meanwhile, the city people are described walking the streets with knives in hand, taking them to be sharpened, and reminiscent of al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq, as well as the 'predatory' readers that al-Nayhūm imagines himself addressing in '*Man akala al-qiddīd*'. The sheep's death is similarly dwelled upon, as the narrator describes how an anonymous 'they' – presumably his parents – slaughtered it in front of him. The aftermath is then represented in 'blackened strips of meat hanging from the clothes line'.[219]

[214] Al-Faqīh, 'Libyan Short Story,' 148.
[215] Ibid., 149.
[216] Al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsim*,' 29.
[217] Ibid., 30.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.

The reaction of the narrator's younger self is then portrayed in extremer terms, with his horrified identification with the sheep foregrounded as he describes how, dying, 'the sheep remained trembling (*yantafiḍ*) like my heart'.[220] Following the sheep's death, he recalls 'weeping like I had never wept before'.[221] Furthermore, while the boy in '*Rajā*" questions the specific logic of Eid, al-Fākhirī's narrator simply expresses horror over the very process of slaughter and meat-eating, juxtaposing, as al-'Amāmī notes, the motives of the anonymous 'they' to his own innocent companionship: 'They had sacrificed the sheep for the sake of eating it (*min ajl an ya'kulūhu*), just as I had sacrificed my food for the sake of the sheep (*min ajl al-kharūf*)'.[222] Repetition of '*min ajl*' (for the purpose of) emphasises the juxtaposition of greed to companionship, and, in conclusion, the boy condemns the tradition as 'a bloody Eid', in which 'people celebrate the slaughter of a friend (*ṣadīq*) before gobbling down its meat'.[223]

While lacking the sharp satire of al-Nayhūm's stories, al-Fākhirī deconstructs Eid in similarly powerful terms. In '*al-Ḥikāya al-thāmina 'ashra*' ('The Eighteenth Story'), the narrator reveals that his recollection of it was, in fact, prompted by the 1973 Ramadan War, a year before the publication of '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*'. Recalling a conversation about the war, the narrator establishes various connections between his reaction to it, and his childhood experience of Eid. First, he describes himself weeping 'as I had never wept before', and then repeats the phrase '*min ajl*', alongside the words '*madhbaḥ*' (altar) and '*qurbān*' (offerings), as his conversant describes how 'the martyrs of the war (*shuhadā' al-ḥarb*) had been killed like offerings (*qurbān*) on the altar (*madhbaḥ*) of Sinai for the purpose (*min ajl*) of restoring diplomatic relations with the USA... and for that

[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.; al-'Amāmī, *Quṭ'ān*, 54.
[223] Al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsim*,' 30.

purpose only (*min ajl dhālik faqaṭ*)'.[224] Concluding, the narrator simply states, in the tone of a proverb, 'So the tale goes: sheep aren't the only unlucky ones. Humans are too!'[225]

Between al-Fākhirī's seventeenth and eighteenth tales, Eid therefore becomes a rite-of-passage into violence and warfare, with the inevitability of the latter suggested by the yearly occurrence of the former. In this respect, it is also significant that '*al-Ḥikāya al-sādisa 'ashra*' ('The Sixteenth Story'), preceding the memory of Eid, simply consists of statistics indicating the percentage of different populations killed by various invading forces throughout history.[226] Fluctuating between individual and historical memory, horror over sheep companion and human soldiers, al-Fākhirī therefore ties personal trauma to collective trauma, hinting that the suffering of all, and the violence that causes it, are somehow one.

This bleakness is, however, occasionally mitigated by expressions of hope, conveyed in Sufi terms, and drawing creatures together through spirituality rather than violence. In his '*al-Ḥikāya al-tāsi'a 'ashra*' ('The Nineteenth Story'), for example, al-Fākhirī returns from memories of the Ramadan War to Room 211 in 'mournful Benghazi' (*Binghāzī al-ḍayyiqa al-ṣadr*), describing the gusting of the Qiblī wind and the flooding that follows. Swiftly, however, he moves from the streams that fill the streets to imagining how the rain cleanses the earth and brings fertility, describing the subsequent sunrise, 'making you realise that you, too, must arise and strive onwards on God's land (*arḍ Allāh*)'.[227] Beyond violence and sentiments of '*waḥda*', '*arḍ Allāh*' offers a vision of unity, and, as al-'Amāmī notes, al-Fākhirī's work indeed moved increasingly from depictions of specific places to contemplation of humanity as a whole, breaking down barriers

[224] Ibid., 31
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid., 28-29.
[227] Ibid., 32.

between people and the natural environment around them.[228] This harmony is expressed even in al-Fākhirī's first and second tales, as another antidote to loneliness, alongside the act of narration:

> That creature (*makhlūq*) no longer feels the same when he awakes. He is no longer clouded in confusion for he has realised that all the ceilings he sees on waking are one (*al-suquf wāḥida*) and that the Earth is one (*al-arḍ wāḥida*) and that humans alone divide up rooms, houses, cities and themselves as well (*al-bashar kadhālik*).[229]

In '*al-Ḥikāya al-thāniyya*' ('The Second Tale'), he then moves into a translation and interpretation of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) as a mystical voyage in which Santiago overcomes loneliness (*waḥda*) through embracing the ocean world, prompted by his sighting of a flock of wild ducks. Concluding, al-Fākhirī states: 'when a heart is great enough, it can encompass all, and take all as a friend (*ṣadīq*)'.[230]

Providing escape into 'other worlds', rooted in the physical reality of *arḍ Allāh*, while also dwelling in uncompromising visions of violence, al-Fākhirī's fiction strikingly contrasts al-Nayhūm's more satirical dystopias, inhabited by fake sheep and 'predatory brothers', and more specific utopias, based on practical steps towards social responsibility. In the companionship of child and sheep, their writing is, however, briefly paralleled, while, in broader fiction, it is undoubtedly al-Fākhirī's combined portrayal of childish horror, animal suffering and creaturely mortality that resonates most powerfully. Among other writers from the sixties generation, for example, it finds a striking parallel in Yusūf al-Sharīf (b. 1938), who wrote several collections of short stories for adults in addition to his many for children.

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[228] Al-'Amāmī, *Quṭ'ān*, 182-3.

[229] Al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsīm al-ḥikāyāt*,' 10. Al-'Amāmī, *Quṭ'ān*, 182-3.

[230] Al- Fākhirī, '*Mawsīm al-ḥikāyāt*,' 10.

In '*al-Jarād: sīrat ṭufūla lībiyya*' ('The Locusts: Tale of a Libyan Childhood'), memories of Eid, while initially infused with nostalgia for aromatic meat, 'salted, dried, fried in oil then stored in jars', shift swiftly into visceral slaughter.[231] The butcher, Ḥājj Muḥammad's, 'unfathomable smile', is described, as well as knives, 'polished and sharpened, large and small'. The image of the dying sheep, with its 'bulging eyes' (*al-'aynayn al-jāḥiẓatayn*) and 'throttled rattle' (*ḥashraja makhnūqa*) then surpasses the detail of both al-Nayhūm and al-Fākhirī's depictions. Finally, through the root *h-m-d*, signifying 'calmness' and 'stillness' but also the 'stiffness' of a corpse, the sheep's death, the boy's trauma and human mortality are all linked:

> The body grew still (*hamada*) and the muscles loosened [...] I stood where I was, lifeless (*hāmidan*), as my father shovelled earth into the pit [...] Eventually, what I had witnessed before that deep pit faded from my mind, but, from time to time, I would see the spilt blood and hear the throttled rattle, until the day came when I saw men's necks dangling, and their rigid (*ḥāmida*) bodies piled on rubbish trucks.[232]

Unlike al-Fākhirī, al-Sharīf does not mention the specific war that he associates with Eid, with the 'martyrs' of the Ramadan War becoming simply 'men'. He also does not depict any particular companionship with the sheep. In both, however, a remembered childhood self, reading the sheep as 'creaturely sign', is associated with adult experiences of violence and death. In this way, rather than allegorically distancing the horror of particular events, the sheep's slaughter represents a rite-of-passage manqué, in which an understanding of mortality and violence is the sole outcome. This is also

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[231] Yusūf al-Sharīf, '*Al-Jarād: Sīrat ṭufūla lībiyya*,' *Scribd*, accessed April 28, 2016. http://www.scribd.com/doc/150664039/الجراد. '*al-Jarād*' was published along with other of al-Sharīf's writing on digital library *Scribd*. I have been unable to ascertain the date of the story's writing and publication, despite efforts to contact the author.

[232] Ibid.

true of later authors. As expressions of companionship fade, and the gory details of slaughter intensify, more complex, and often grimmer, spiritual expressions emerge in fiction from the 2000s, when the next significant depictions of sheep appear, bearing the marks of three decades of Gaddafi's oppressive regime.

Sacrifice and Circumcision: Rite-of-Passage into Other Worlds

The link between Eid sacrifice and the rite of circumcision provides the opening scenes to Kamal Ben Hameda's (b. 1954) *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (2011; *Under the Tripoli Sky*), the fictional memoir of a boy nicknamed Hadachinou, growing up, like Ben Hameda, in 1960s' Tripoli.[233] Combining the young boy's voice with the reflective tone of his older self, the memoir brings defining moments from childhood into the broader perspective of Libya's history. Told in a series of fragmented memories, many focussing on the women of Hadachinou's neighbourhood, a plural mix of Arab, Italian, Berber, African and Jewish origin, the memoir is characterised by both nostalgia and foreboding, and Hadachinou's sense of dislocation is evident as he wanders alone through the city. As Hisham Matar comments, he stands for the uncertainty of the nation as a whole:

> The figure of Hadachinou – which in Libyan-Arabic dialect means 'What is this' – seems to be the question mark that hangs over the fate of the nation. His curiosity, dreaminess, timid inquisitiveness and resistance are an allegory for the young country's desire and potential.[234]

The characteristics embodied by Hadachinou are undoubtedly also those of Ben Hameda. Living in Tripoli until the early 1970s, his rebellious attitude to the new

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[233] Kamal Ben Hameda, *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (Tunis: Éditions Elyzad, 2011); trans. Adriana Hunter, *Under the Tripoli Sky* (London: Peirene Press, 2014). The title literally translates as *In the Company of Tripolitanian Women*.

[234] Matar, 'Tripoli Fruits,' *Times Literary Supplement*, January 16, 2015.

regime led to his departure for France. Eventually, he settled in Holland, where he remains today, a jazz musician and writer. All of his work, consisting primarily of poetry, is written in French, while he expresses how Arabic has, for him, become entangled in power and ideology. In his own childhood memoir, *La mémoire de l'absent* (1999; *The Memory of the Absent*), for example, he contrasts Modern Standard Arabic to the vibrant Tripolitanian dialect of his youth, and describes how he was made to chant ideological refrains first to King Idrīs and then to Gaddafi, stating that, 'It was a long road before I rediscovered my mother's tongue and the language of my childhood'.[235]

The monolithic power of ideology certainly haunts *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, visible in evocations of patriarchy, colonisation and war, and interwoven in Hadachinou's own, more everyday, experiences of death and pain. His circumcision represents the memoir's first significant event. On the appointed day, he sees Ibrahim the butcher, 'facing a bleating orphan lamb', and reminding him of the 'annual round' of Eids past:

> Each year, the same gestures performed with perfect skill. The same fascination on children's faces... All the way to grilling the head and the feet.
>
> The sheep's squalling, on and on, right up to the last moment, right up until its head is under the knife, when it sees the gleaming blade... It stops, accepts, gives up and watches its own decapitation with already glassy eyes (*les yeux déjà vitreux*). Blood spilling.[236]

As in the stories of al-Nayhūm, al-Fākhirī and al-Sharīf, the butcher's casualness is indicated as he whistles pop songs. Similarly, none of the grim details are spared, with

[235] Kamal Ben Hameda, *La mémoire de l'absent* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001), 21-22.
[236] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 16; *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, 17.

Hadachinou describing 'Rivulets of slow-flowing blood, smaller streams coagulating [...] Hunks of the lamb hanging over the sink. Bones piled up like a still life'.[237]

Unlike the narrators described thus far, Hadachinou is not immediately traumatised by the sight, and watches events with a 'mixture of amazement, curiosity and quasi-morbid delight'.[238] Despite this seeming light-heartedness, however, the sheep's slaughter evidently haunts him, visible in his description of the moment of its death: 'The sheep's silence, its eyes changing colour, its furious bleating as it faced the deafening void (*en face du néant assourdissant*) [...]'.[239] The oxymoronic juxtaposition of the sheep's 'silence' and 'its furious bleating' introduces a dream-like quality to the memory, compounded by mention of 'the deafening void' which he perceives in the animal's eyes. Young and old narrative voices then join in a recollection that seems to transcend time altogether: 'Images of what was happening, what happened each year in this millennial ancestral ritual, spooled through my mind like an age-old dream brooded over again and again (*un vieux rêve mainte fois ruminé*)'.[240]

The impression the sheep makes on Hadachinou is further revealed as, during his circumcision, he submits to the knife himself, recalling the sheep as he is held down: 'I gaze up at the ceiling and picture the glassy look (*le regard vitreux*) in the sheep's eyes on the day of sacrifice, a look full of renunciation'.[241] After being rendered momentarily passive through recollecting the sheep, Hadachinou soon begins to struggle. Overpowered by the surrounding men, he then retreats, traumatised, into himself:

> I lower my eyelids to protect myself and, for the first time, delve deep inside myself to find the place where I can safely watch episodes of my life [...] Lost in

[237] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 17.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 16; *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, 17.
[240] Ibid., 17; 17.
[241] Ibid., 20; 21.

> this indefinable chasm (*cette indicible béance*), I suddenly became aware of an explosion of women's laughter from the kitchen, a burst of cheerful voices lilting with the sheer joy of life and jostling together like a mass of balloons released to mark a feast day.[242]

The 'indefinable chasm' into which Hadachinou retreats recalls the 'deafening void' he perceives in the sheep's eyes, with Eid slaughter and circumcision both shrouded in a sense of powerlessness, trauma and mortality. Both are, furthermore, primarily linked to the stern world of men, depicted as they arrive for Hadachinou's circumcision: 'Eyes to the ground, one behind the other, they walked towards me as I sat on the doorstep. They stepped over me without a word or a smile and climbed up the steps'.[243] In contrast, the joy of the women brings Hadachinou back from his 'chasm'.

As this juxtaposition suggests, *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* is broadly characterised by a divide between male and female worlds, with the former consistently linked to violence, whether domestic abuse or historical warfare, and official ritual and ideology. Women, the principal victims of both, are, like Hadachinou, often described through the suffering of animals. Inadvertently witnessing his Aunt Hiba being raped by her husband, for example, Hadachinou again refers to Eid al-Adha: 'Aunt Hiba was wailing like a camel being slaughtered for the Feast of the Sacrifice, a poor creature dying in public ignored by passers-by'.[244]

In response to their suffering, meanwhile, women's spirituality serves as an antidote to the stern world of men. The 'sorceress' Hadja Kimya, for example, advises Hadachinou to:

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[242] Ibid., 20-21; 21.

[243] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 19.

[244] Ibid., 28.

> Take care of your soul as the wind does, have fun on your own as a butterfly does and live within yourself as a mountain does [...] You need only your eyes to fly away [...] reaching that other country, changing your dreams, finding other shores (*arriver au pays, changer de rêve, de rivages*)...'.[245]

His Aunt Nafissa, meanwhile, provides an alternative to the stern Qur'ānic education to which he must submit:

> Allah just means that: It means "Ah!" It's that moment when an apparition or an event captivates us, or when we're simply amazed by little aspects of everyday life. That's when Allah reveals himself. It's men and their power struggles who have formalized something that was originally a state of pure wonder (*émerveillement*) and recognition (*reconnaissance*).[246]

Contrasting the formalized ideology of men to 'other shores' and 'pure wonder', Hadja Kimya and Aunt Nafissa's words echo the spiritual and environmental 'other worlds' conveyed by al-Fākhirī's '*arḍ Allāh*', serving, as in '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāṭ*', to counteract first experiences of mortality and violence.

Similarly, these experiences are also linked to pan-historical visions of ideology and violence. Aunt Nafissa, for example, links current and historical abuse of women:

> Apart from their bellies and their pricks, the only thing men are interested in is destroying with one hand what they've just created with the other. I remember the war, the famine and the way women were raped when the Italian soldiers entered Tripoli: they spread shame and loathing through the city. After the Greeks, the Romans, the Vandals, the Arab tribes and the Turks, it was their

[245] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 103-104; *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, 108.
[246] Ibid., 98; 103.

> turn to try out their virility on our bodies. And they're still at it now, they're just wearing different clothes. Sewer rats, the lot of them.[247]

This diatribe, uttered by Aunt Nafissa, attributes Libya's colonial past and patriarchal present to a combination of 'belly', 'prick' and ideology, evoking what Ben Hameda elsewhere terms the 'banners of the absurd' that have been raised, one after the other, over the land.[248] In *La mémoire de l'absent*, meanwhile, his critique shifts explicitly to Gaddafi. Paying tribute to benevolent uncles, in parallel to Hadachinou's tenderly described aunts, the memoir is infused with the memory of men who suffered or were killed by the regime, and, alongside *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, offers a vision of the inhabitants of Tripoli in circumstances beyond their power, both to change and to cope with.

This, finally, is the impression conveyed by the opening depiction of sacrifice and circumcision in *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*. Ben Hameda specifically critiques neither Eid nor circumcision, but simply ties them into the many instances of violence and pain into which a child must be initiated, and the 'other worlds' that serve as compensation.[249] In the final authors I examine, meanwhile, visions of slaughter are linked to yet profounder expressions of violence, to which no spiritual 'other worlds' are offered as respite. These stories open up worlds of pure, vulnerable flesh, threatened by cold, steel knives. In them, sheep are identified with almost totally.

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[247] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 35.

[248] Kamal Ben Hameda, 'Dans les sables,' *Lignes* 3, no. 36 (2011): 48.

[249] An interesting parallel to Ben Hameda's *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* is a short autobiographical article, also written in 2011, by Hisham Matar: 'Once Upon a Life' (*The Guardian*, February 20, 2011). In it, he describes being taken from the 'fun' company of women to 'the earnest and self-important gatherings of the men'. A specific moment of passage is further described through a hunting trip in the desert during which a herd of serene deer are mowed down. Matar identifies this as the moment he decided to become a writer.

Creaturely Meat: Eid Sheep and the Vulnerability-of-Being

Commenting on Michel Foucault's lecture 'Abnormal', Chloë Taylor explores how alimentary appetites, like sexual appetites, continue to be 'sites of normalization' and of 'disciplinary power', enforcing certain discourses and patterns of behaviour.[250] Through Sālim al-Awjalī's (b. 1961) '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*' (2001; 'The Knife's Desire') and Najwā Bin Shatwān's (b. 1970) "*Īd khāṭi*" (2008; 'Flawed Festival'), I examine how the normalization of carnivorous eating habits is powerfully overturned, and, in the process, wider instances of oppression and violence are tacitly yet powerfully evoked.[251] Extending the horror of al-Nayhūm and al-Fākhirī's narrators over the consumption of their 'friends', the narrative voices in both short stories shatter the distance typically maintained between carnivorousness and cannibalism. Through connecting the dual meanings of '*laḥm*', as both 'flesh' and 'meat', the stories express uncomfortable visions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness-of-being), primarily characterised by violence and the vulnerability-of-being.[252] I begin with '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*', in which the protagonist's horror over the sheep's death reaches an apogee, and conclude with "*Īd khāṭi*", exploring a surprising variation on the familiar child narrator.

Like al-Sharīf, al-Awjalī is primarily a writer of children's stories, and, like al-Sharīf, his adult fiction provides a grim contrast to it. Born and raised in Benghazi, he graduated in literature from Garyounis University and went on to work at Libyan publishing house *al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya*. *Shahwat al-sikkīn* is his first collection of adult stories,

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[250] Chloë Taylor, 'Abnormal Appetites: Foucault, Atwood, and the Normalization of an Animal-Based Diet,' *Journal of Critical Animal Studies* 10, no. 4 (2012), 133.

[251] Sālim al-Awjalī, '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*,' in *Shahwat al-sikkīn*, 51-58 (Misrata: Al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 2000); Najwa Bin Shatwān, "*Īd Khāṭi*'," in *al-Malika*, 155 (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2008).

[252] For discussion of the traditional separation of carnivorous and cannibalistic imagery, see Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 175.

characterised by scenes of violence, and, undoubtedly, by fear of censorship. '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*', its title story, may be translated either as 'The Knife's Desire', or 'Desire for the Knife', due to ambiguity between agent and patient in the Arabic possessive construction (*iḍāfa*). As the story reveals, however, both meanings are appropriate. In it, the knife becomes personified, described as desiring flesh. At the same time, through this solitary emotion, it becomes an abstract source of violence, removing agency from humans to a force beyond them. Obsessed with this 'desire', the protagonist dwells on the vulnerability of flesh, and the inevitable violence to which it is subjected.

Unlike the previous stories, '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*' is told in the third-person. This does not, however, provide any distance from the unnamed protagonist's disturbed thoughts, creating an oppressive and claustrophobic atmosphere. Simply put, the story tells of his childhood memories of Eid, linked to increasingly traumatic dreams and visions, which are portrayed in the opening vision of a human being gutted, and watching his flesh in fascination: 'With a swift, sharp stab, the knife ripped apart his clothes and opened up his belly. He touched the long, horizontal wound, and his hands sank into its softness and warmth'.[253] This vision leads directly to a memory of Eid, as the protagonist recalls his father's knives for 'slaughtering, skinning and cutting up' (*al-dhabḥ wa-l-salkh wa-l-taqṭīʿ*), and how he is made to watch the ritual in order to 'understand slaughter' (*tafham al-dhabḥ*).[254] What follows is another grim evocation of initiation into mortality:

> The knife passed across the throat and the sheep's blood gushed. He watched the fountain of crimson blood seep from its warm veins, forming a small puddle

[253] Al-Awjalī, '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*,' 53.
[254] Ibid., 54.

> on the courtyard floor. From there, the light vapour of a departing soul (*rūḥ tatalāshā*) rose into the air.[255]

The butchering of the sheep is dwelt upon at painful length, followed by his father's skinning of the animal, described in similar detail, with the very 'crunch' (*ṭaqṭaqa*) of neck bones described. The sheep, in other words, becomes only quivering muscles and pouring blood, while the boy is described watching at a distance and 'imagining the knife on his own neck'.[256]

These motifs, extended beyond the authors already examined, are then linked to the protagonist's growing obsession with his own vulnerability, and his intuition of an inexplicable attraction between flesh and knife. During his first shave, another rite-of-passage, he cuts his chin, recognising it as part of what he calls, 'the game of knife and flesh' (*lu'bat al-sikkīn wa-l-laḥm*).[257] In addition, he begins to obsess over the process of consuming meat, imagining his body literally composed of the flesh of animals: 'He imagined the souls (*arwāḥ*) of cows, sheep and birds, demanding to retrieve their bodies from his own'.[258] Unable to walk past a butcher, he begins to eat only vegetables 'calculating the time it would take for plants to replace animals in his body'.[259] In the story's final image, these obsessions merge as he dreams of himself in the midst of a 'banquet' (*ma'duba*) of his own flesh, hacking at it with a knife, and bringing together imagery of carnivorousness and cannibalism.[260] Just as the sheep was reduced to quivering flesh and pouring blood, so, too, is the protagonist.

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[255] Ibid.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid., 57.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid., 58.
[260] Ibid.

As a whole, the protagonist's fascination with knives and disgust of carnivorousness may be interpreted on levels political, psychological and spiritual. The phrase 'game of knife and flesh' could, for example, refer in veiled terms to oppression and war, alongside the father's command for him to 'understand slaughter'. On the other hand, the 'game' is also one among many expressions of the protagonist's overwhelming obsessions with mortality, with his disjuncture from society expressing both protest and mental illness. Finally, mention of the Eid sheep's departing 'soul', and that of the animals the protagonist has consumed, hints at a spirituality underlying the interconnectivity of flesh, with disturbed 'souls' at the mercy of cold steel knives. Political protest, psychological disorder and spiritual insight therefore intertwine, as the reader's attention shifts between the protagonist's traumatic visions and the 'devilish desire' of the personified knife. Above all, a sense of oppression emerges through the story, and the impression that its abstract vision of violence hints obliquely at what cannot be said directly.

Horror over meat-eating, in and of itself, is significantly also a frequent theme in wider Libyan fiction, most particularly in the writing of Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, discussed in later chapters. In other authors' work, it is widely associated with childhood too. In Aḥmad al-Faytūrī's (b. 1955) *Sarīb* (2000; *A Long Story*), for example, the narrator describes his childhood affection for a gazelle, violently ended after his father tricks him into eating its roasted flesh. Imagining that he has consumed his own flesh, he describes how he developed a violent sickness, described as 'gazelle-blood fever' (*ḥummā dam al-ghazāl*).[261] Meanwhile, in Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Aqīla's (b. 1958) memoir, *al-Jirāb: Ḥikāyat naj'* (2003; *A Sack of Village Stories*),[262] the slaughter of a favourite goat by the boy's father leads to his total abandonment of meat: 'how could I eat a being which I loved and

[261] Al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb*, 82.

[262] Literally, *The Bag: The Story of a Village*.

which loved me? When I eat meat, a feeling of sin overtakes me'.[263] In both, horror over the slaughter of animals is also linked to wider instances of violence. In *Sarīb*, the boy's illness leads him to recall the death of his brother, hit by a lorry, as well as the escalating political unrest of 1960s' Libya.[264] In *al-Jirāb*, the boy is reminded of the she-goat's death after being beaten at school for not memorizing the Qur'ān, and after seeing his favourite tree felled by modern machinery.[265]

The most prominent parallel to '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*', however, emerges in 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl's (b. 1961) '*al-Bukamā*" (2005; 'The Mute'), in which the young female protagonist is said to have spoken only once in her life, on witnessing the butchery of a sheep in the market.[266] As she rants, raves and throws up, the sheep's death causes her to reflect on how her mother's breasts are also 'meat' (*laḥm*), and to question how the consumption of animals is therefore possible.[267] Entwined with her first period, and fear of her tyrannical mother and of marriage, the story is another example of 'rite of passage manqué', with the girl, like the protagonist of '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*', profoundly at odds with society's normalising discourses, while also absorbed in visions of spiritual connectivity. Perceiving how the eyes of dead fish and the fishermen that catch them are characterized by an identical 'sadness' (*ḥuzn*), she ponders the yearning of all life to return to its 'origin' (*aṣl*).[268] Perhaps the most explicitly Sufi of Libyan authors, al-Ghazāl frequently dwells on such grimly material visions of oneness, and will be discussed more in my next chapter. Meanwhile, the 'sad eyes' of fish and fishermen lead me to my final Eid sheep.

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[263] Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Aqīla, *Al-Jirāb: ḥikāyat al-naj'* (Benghazi: *Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Mujtama' al-Madanī*, 2012), 21.

[264] Al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb*, 82-86.

[265] 'Aqīla, *al-Jirāb*, 107, 124-5.

[266] 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl, '*al-Bukamā*',' in *al-Saw'a*, 69-98 (Sharjah: Dā'irat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-I'lām, 2005).

[267] Ibid., 84.

[268] Ibid., 79.

Bringing together themes of existential sadness, *waḥdat al-wujūd* and violence, Najwā Bin Shatwān's "*Īd khāṭi*" is told not from the perspective of a child, but from the sheep itself. While marking a break with the theme of this chapter, it nevertheless provides a striking means for tying together the increasingly gruesome visions of slaughter I have discussed, and the shifting forms of identification with the sheep, from companion to flesh, bone and blood. Taken from Bin Shatwān's collection, *al-Malika* (2008; *The Queen*), "*Īd khāṭi*" represents a fragmentary meditation rather than a short story, and is one of many short texts in the collection, some of which are simply titled '*ṣūra maqtaʿiyya li-*' (a partial picture of-). Among these 'partial pictures' are, for example, 'A partial picture of a heart' and 'A partial picture of a donkey'.[269] In "*Īd khāṭi*", this fragmentary structure provides a suitable framework for the literal fragmenting of the focalised ram as he is butchered and consumed. Representing the ultimate deconstruction of the cohesive, celebratory force of Eid, this fragmentary aesthetics is a striking feature of Bin Shatwān's broader fiction.

Born in Ajdabia, Bin Shatwān studied Education at university, and then became an assistant lecturer at Garyounis University. She is currently pursuing a PhD in Rome on the topic of slavery. With various collections of short stories and what she terms 'texts' (*nuṣūṣ*) to her name, she has achieved recognition for her distinctive literary style. Much of her fiction is written from unusual, and often disconcerting, nonhuman and inanimate perspectives. Among her other works is, for example, *Maḍmūn burtuqālī* (2007; *Orange on the Inside*), told largely from the perspective of a river.[270] "*Īd khāṭi*", another example, epitomises Viktor Shklovsky's concept of 'defamiliarization', in which art makes the common uncommon through an estranged eye, and aptly conveys

[269] Bin Shatwān, *al-Malika*, 25, 51-54.

[270] Literally, 'An Orangey Content'.

Anat Pick's definition of creaturely poetics as a process of 'dehumanizing' narrative, translating defamiliarization 'into the terms of the discourse of species':[271]

> He watched them sadly (*bi-ḥuznin*) as they tied up his hind and fore legs (*rijlayhi wa-yadayhi*). His sadness grew, his tongue froze and his ears drooped as he listened to their conversation, resonating with desire to end his existence [...] They hung up his head as a sign of celebration (*'ilāmat iḥtifāl*) [...] He continued to watch them sadly (*bi-ḥuznin*) as, after severing his head, they sliced up his flesh (*laḥmahu*) and stewed it [...] by evening he had been split into many little bits in their bellies, causing them indigestion through their own gluttony (*al-ifrāṭ fī-l-akl*). When they released him from their bowels, the big ram would return to life in another form of sadness (*fī shaklin ākhar min al-ḥuzn*).[272]

Forcing Eid to be view from within the perspective of the victim, "*'Īd khāṭi*" exemplifies how Libyan fiction transforms celebration to sadness. More striking yet, the first sentence introduces ambiguity over who is speaking, with the word '*yad*' potentially referring either to a human 'hand' or animal 'foreleg' and '*rijl*' referring to both human and animal legs.[273] The first indication that the perspective is nonhuman is, therefore, the sentence 'His ears drooped' (*tahadallat udhnāhu*), another physical image of sadness.

Through the sheep's eyes, meanwhile, humans appear unambiguously rapacious. As in the other stories examined, the slaughter knife is emphasised, and, as in Ben Hameda's *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, the sheep witnesses it in their hands, representing an infraction to the rules of halal slaughter, which ordain that an animal should not see the blade. As the sheep simultaneously perceives the humans' 'desire to end his

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[271] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 195-196.

[272] Bin Shatwān, "*Īd khāṭi*'," in *al-Malika*, 155. See Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique,' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 15-22.

[273] Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1295.

existence', meanwhile, the foundations of Eid are radically challenged, with the sheep as 'sign of celebration (*'ilāmat iḥtifāl*)' shifting to the sheep as 'creaturely sign'. As with the child narrators examined, the animal's sadness may be linked to specific injustices and general brutality, but also to the overall vulnerability-of-being and the circling birth and rebirth of different 'forms of sadness'. The process through which this cyclical rebirth occurs is grimly material, with the deconstruction of flesh paralleling the deconstruction of traditions, discourses and practices.

Conclusion

Through memories of Eid slaughter, human communality and rite-of-passage are inverted, as fiction moves into 'other worlds' of child-sheep companionship and shared 'flesh' and 'meat'. In the process, narrative is, to varying degrees, dehumanised, becoming absorbed within the perspective of the victim, its sadness, or simply its suffering, while the recognised 'signs' of Eid transform into the language of vulnerable flesh, and of an elusive, lost unity. Marked by the casualness of the adult butcher, slaughter conveys different allegorical layers, from al-Nayhūm's specific critique of superstition and 'squandering of nation', to the inexpressible horror of al-Awjalī's '*Shahwat al-sikkīn*'. In the examples considered, from 1965 until 2011, the sheep is also identified with to an increasing degree, as al-Nayhūm's empty sheepskins move to Bin Shatwān's sad, skinned ram. In my next chapter, such viscerality is largely absent, with birds trapped not by humans' violence, but their discourses, defining, limiting and curtailing their flight. Amidst these visions, human language is powerfully deconstructed through birdsong, just as was human flesh through the Eid sheep.

Chapter 2 – Flight Curtailed: Birdsong, Stories and Other Worlds

More than any other creatures, birds are laden with symbolic import. In folkloric and religious traditions from across the world, their flight is read as tidings of good or evil, and as announcing important changes within climate and community. In stories of Libyan childhood, they are connected to the unknown: the secrets that children wish to discover; and the alternate worlds they wish to inhabit. Contrasting the creaturely immanence of the Eid sheep, they therefore embody tantalising and elusive 'signs', while the critique conveyed through their capture is subtler, pointing not to outright oppression, but to the stories children are told, the epistemologies underlying them, and the very language in which they are expressed. In the Qur'ān, birds are similarly connected to the unknown, explicitly described as '*āyāt*' (signs, 16:79), while King Solomon is said to have been taught their mysterious '*manṭiq*' (speech, 27:16). Within Sufism, special import is granted to their language, exemplified by texts such as *Tasbīḥ al-ṭuyūr* (*The Rosary of the Birds*) by Persian poet Sanai (d. 1131) and *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*The Conference/Speech of the Birds*) by Farīḍ al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār (1145-1221). As Ali Asani remarks, imagery and symbolism related to 'soul-birds' also represent central and nuanced features of Sufi poetry.[274]

Above all, whether as folkloric omens, Qur'ānic signs or Sufi souls, birds are connected to *al-ghayb* (the unknown). Remarking on the particular fascination that they hold for humans, and their prominent presence in world literature, Leonard Lutwack stresses how their flight and the elusive nature of their song make them both more visible than other animals, while also more unattainable.[275] They therefore hover between the familiar and the mysterious, *al-shahāda* and *al-ghayb*:

[274] Asani, '"Oh that I could be a bird",' 170.

[275] Leonard Lutwack, *Birds in Literature* (Florida: University of Florida Press, 1994), x-xi.

> Birds are the envy of humankind because they appear to exist happily and effortlessly in a state of mixed animal and spiritual being that humans long to attain [...] To the human ear bird song sounds almost like speech, even expressive of human feelings, and yet it is a communication stranger than speech and not quite the same as music. Arcane utterance and the freedom to escape earth seem to suggest a relationship with the supernatural in both its cosmic and minute forms.[276]

The bird, as Lutwack further comments, is also strongly associated with memory:

> Among animals the bird is the most productive of 'reminders' and associations. Somehow sighting a bird or hearing a bird's song evokes the memory of other occasions when the bird was seen or heard and the feelings associated with those occasions.[277]

Many Libyan authors have described youthful encounters with birds. In one of Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's (b. 1942) earliest short stories, '*Ṭā'ir al-ṭufūla al-azghab*' (1965; 'The Downy Bird of Childhood'), for example, the narrating protagonist establishes the bird as a symbol of childhood lost, while also describing his youthful fascination with collecting eggs and watching flocks overhead.[278] In Kamal Ben Hameda's (b. 1954) *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (2011), Hadachinou's favourite haunt is the tomb of marabout Sidi Mounaïder, where he lies absorbed in the song of sparrows.[279] Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Aqīla's (b. 1958) memoir *al-Jirāb* (2003) also explicitly links birds to the unknown:

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[276] Ibid.

[277] Ibid., 15.

[278] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*Ṭā'ir al-ṭufūla al-azghab*,' in *Thalāth majmū'āt qiṣaṣiyya*, 80-83 (Tripoli: *Qiṭā' al-Kitāb wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān*, 1981).

[279] Ben Hameda, *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, 51, 61, 73.

> 'What does the lark know?' I wondered, 'What secrets does it keep?' For us, the lark is a sacred bird, for it made its nests in the prophet's footsteps during the *hijra* [...] So whenever we stumbled across a nest in the fields, we'd take great care not to disturb it.[280]

In this chapter, flight and song, the bird's defining characteristics, are examined as domains through which alternative spheres of knowledge and longing for 'other worlds' and lost childhood worlds are explored. As with the Eid sheep, these worlds, and the creaturely fellowships through which they are envisioned, are circumscribed by adult discourses, negotiating issues of tradition and modernity, spirituality, and, ultimately, the very potential of human language to convey meaning.

Beginning with the dynamics of the bird's capture, I examine Muḥammad al-Misallātī's (b. 1949) *Layl al-jaddāt* (2008; *Night of the Grandmas*) and Muḥammad al-Aṣfar's (b. 1960) *Sharmūla* (2008; *Sharmoula*), both combining fiction and autobiography in hybrid, genre-defying works.[281] I then move to evocations of birdsong in more explicitly Sufi fiction. After returning briefly to 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl's (b. 1961) '*al-Bukamā*" (2005; 'The Mute'), I focus on Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's *Wāw al-ṣughrā: riwāya fī siyar* (1997; *New Waw: Saharan Oasis*, trans. William Hutchins, 2014), introducing the author's rich and complex cultural heritage, and the central place of the 'creaturely sign' in his work.[282] Lastly, I offer some comparative perspectives on the role of sign and symbol in both al-Kūnī and al-Nayhūm's work, exploring possible points of confluence between the two.

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[280] 'Aqīla, *al-Jirāb*, 62-63.

[281] Muḥammad al-Misallātī, *Layl al-jaddāt* (Tripoli: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Ām, 2008); Muḥammad al-Aṣfar, *Sharmūla* (Lattakia: Dār al-Ḥiwār li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 2008). The extract that I examine was translated by Ali Azeriah as 'The Hoopoe,' *Banipal 40* (2011): 137-143. The title of the novel, *Sharmūla*, refers to a traditional type of Libyan salad.

[282] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Wāw al-ṣughrā: riwāya fī siyar* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1997); trans. William M. Hutchins, *New Waw: Saharan Oasis* (Austin: The University of Texas at Austin, 2014). Literally, the title is *New Wār: A Novel through Tales*.

Bird Traps: Grandmas' Tales and Children Transformed

In historian Sālim al-Shalābī's *Tadhkira ila 'ālam al-ṭufūla* (1982; *A Ticket to Childhood*), an encyclopaedic account of childhood in Libya, trapping birds is listed as a common pastime.[283] It also forms a recurring motif in Libyan fiction, often alongside depictions of Eid sheep. In Khalīfa al-Fākhirī's (1942-2001) '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāṭ*' (1974; 'Season of Stories'), for example, the narrator recalls selling birds in the market to an old man named Sī Sulaymān, his name echoing the Qur'ānic king, who immediately frees them to fly 'in God's heavens' (*fī samāwāt Allāh*).[284] As he watches them soar away, the boy initially considers the man to be 'deranged' (*ma'tūh*), but gradually begins to feel ashamed, and, after Sī Sulaymān dies, is overcome with 'copious love' (*al-ḥūbb al-ghāmir*) as he remembers his rescue of the birds.[285] Aḥmad al-Faytūri's (b. 1954) *Sarīb* (2001; *A Long Story*) draws on similar motifs. The narrator's grandmother, in particular, is associated with birds, having a high-pitched voice, 'like the cheep of a bird', and often reverting to her native Tamazight, which her grandson likens to the 'speech of birds' (*manṭiq al-ṭayr*).[286] In addition, the courtyard of her house is filled with birds, which he describes watching for hours, before being lured by his older cousin into trapping and selling them in the market instead. There, echoing al-Fākhirī, the devout Ḥājj Faraj, his name meaning 'freedom from grief or sorrow', buys the birds and sets them free.[287]

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[283] Sālim Sālim Shalābī, *Tadhkira ilā 'ālam al-ṭufūla* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1982), 381-385.

[284] Al-Fākhirī, '*Mawsim al-ḥikāyāt*,' 19-20.

[285] Ibid. In '*al-Ḥikāya al-rābi'ata 'ashrata*' ('The Fourteenth Tale'), al-Fākhirī also translates a lengthy passage from Chilean poet Pablo Neruda's *Memoirs*, in which he recalls how, as a boy, he witnessed the brutal hunting of swans, and ended up caring for one that had been shot down. See Neruda, *Memoirs*, trans. Hardie St. Martin (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974), 18-19.

[286] Al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb*, 34.

[287] Ibid., 58. Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 822.

In both authors' writing, the curtailing of birds' flight dramatises children's movement into the world of men, contrasted to the spiritual freedom conveyed by '*samāwāt Allāh*' and '*faraj*'. Al-Misallātī's *Layl al-jaddāt* and al-Aṣfar's *Sharmūla* dramatise similar encounters, but direct them instead to an exploration of the place of traditional stories in growing-up and negotiating the world. Both feature the dynamic of story-telling grandmother and child, depicting strikingly similar and fraught encounters with birds. The first concerns an owl and the second a hoopoe, with the former despised and feared within Islamic cultures, and the latter loved and revered. In both, the birds, tied up in folkloric discourses, undergo a series of transformations in the children's perceptions, as they relate to them both from within their grandmothers' tales and outside them. In this way, as al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm puts it, 'all the things that old ladies know' are negotiated.[288] The critique involved is subtler than the horrified violence embodied in scenes of Eid slaughter, while the reflection provoked in children questions not only what humans claim to know, but even their very ability to know.

Unhappy Owl and Unseen Worlds

Al-Misallātī refrains from classifying *Layl al-jaddāt* as either a novel or collection of stories, insisting on the primacy of tales within it, and declaring, 'I will leave their classification to the critic or the reader, while I am simply content to tell them, letting them take the appropriate form'.[289] Born in Benghazi, al-Misallātī worked for most of his life for the Libyan Cement Company, but was also an important figure in the Libyan cultural scene, publishing six collections of short stories between 1968 and the present, and participating in radio broadcast and theatre. While *Layl al-jaddāt* was first published in 2008, al-Misallātī indicates that it emerged through the series, '*Ḥikāyāt*'

[288] Al-Nayhūm, '*Wa-l-ḥibr bi-l-majān*,' in *Ṭaḥiya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd*, 160.
[289] Al-Misallātī, *Layl al-jaddāt*, 10.

('Tales'), that he wrote for the radio during Ramadan from 1970 to 2008.[290] Like al-Nayhūm's articles, his 'tales' were therefore written for an audience, combining humour with the sceptical perspective of the child. They are also clearly based in al-Misallātī's memories of growing up with his grandparents in Benghazi, marked by a fluid, oral style, and often slipping into the narrative perspective of the young boy.

The narrator's grandmother, meanwhile, is the second most significant narrative presence. Despite al-Misallātī's professed nostalgia for his own grandmother's stories, expressed in his introduction, she emerges as something of a sinister figure, whose harrowing tales of jinn and ghouls are juxtaposed to her grandson's innocent absorption in the natural world.[291] The main motivation for her tales is an unromantically disciplinary one, designed to terrify her grandson into compliance. In the first chapters, the motif of metamorphosis dominates her stories, becoming a threat against greed, laziness or loudness. Rather than the neutral verb '*taḥawwala*' (to transform), the grandmother employs '*masakha*' and '*sakhaṭa*', with one being the Qur'ānic term for transformation into an uglier form, and the other its dialect equivalent.[292] Continuously threatening her grandson with '*maskh*' at the hands of jinn, their home becomes an unstable zone where, any second, one might tread on a jinni or be transformed into a cat. In the boy's words, his grandmother 'ties everything into hidden worlds (*'awālim khafiyya*)' which might suddenly and unpleasantly impinge on reality.[293] Losing faith in the stability of external appearances, including his own, he fears cats, which might be jinn, and dogs, which might be naughty children.

Birds, in particular, become a battleground between the boy's instinctual harmony with the natural world, and his grandmother's off-putting stories. Initially, the young

[290] Ibid., 8.
[291] Ibid., 7.
[292] Ibid., 14, 25.
[293] Ibid., 111.

boy thinks it might be fun to be transformed into a bird, and often describes himself lying on the roof of his childhood home, absorbed in their flight. His grandmother, however, soon deters him:

> It's no bundle of fun being a bird. A miserable, weak little thing you'd be, perhaps swiped by a cat and eaten up, or trapped by a hunter [...] Stay as you are – a little boy on firm ground. That's much better than being a bird hanging up there in space where no one knows your fate but *Allāh*.[294]

In response to his grandmother's words, the narrator declares: 'I no longer had love in my heart even for birds, those lovely little creatures, which used to enchant me with their gentle twittering and sudden flight'.[295]

The transformation of the bird, from source of childhood fascination to figure of terror is seen, above all, in Chapter Four, '*Ṭā'ir al-faz*" ('The Bird of Fear'). In this chapter, the boy discovers an owl trapped in the storeroom. The moment of encounter is charged with tension, introduced by the clatter of dishes and flutter of wings. Through the darkness, boy, with heart pounding, spots bird:

> Suddenly, I saw two fiercely blazing orbs examining me with perturbing interest. I must be seeing things! I closed my eyes then blinked several times. The shining orbs remained firmly in place, suspended from the ceiling... I froze... It was an owl. A terrifying owl fixing its two sharp, shining eyes upon me.[296]

[294] Ibid., 24.
[295] Ibid., 30.
[296] Ibid., 54.

The distinctiveness of the owl's 'humanoid' gaze is often cited as the reason for its prominence in folklore and legend.[297] Within Islamic culture, it is associated with both bad luck and *maskh* (metamorphosis).[298] In *Layl al-jaddāt*, meanwhile, its gaze becomes the place where the boy confronts the tales he has been told, weighing them against the physicality of the bird itself. Gazing into the 'blazing orbs', he is initially petrified of the unknown presence before him. Suddenly, however, he remembers his grandmother telling him that when adults whistle they are punished by being turned into owls. Concluding that his grandmother has suffered this fate, he is overtaken with pity, declaring:

> I felt so sorry for my poor, lovely grandma. My heart warmed to the owl. Her gaze had turned into a steady one filled with affection and calm. All fear left my heart. I felt a great rush of friendliness (*ulfa*). She was staring intently at me. She must have recognised me. Wasn't this still my grandma even if she had been turned into an owl?[299]

In Arabic, the words *jadda* (grandma) and *būma* (owl) are both grammatically feminine, and it is therefore unclear whether the boy is referring to one or the other, revealing how thoroughly they have united in his mind. His first instinct, however, is simply to care for the creature, wondering, 'What would my granddad say when he found out what had happened? Would he keep her with us or abandon her? If she stayed where would she sleep?'.[300]

The boy's imaginings soon come to a swift end, however, as his grandmother enters the room behind him, rapping him sharply on the head. It is then her turn to subject

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[297] Desmond Morris, *Owl* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 8.

[298] See Muḥammad Ibn Sirīn, *Tafsīr al-aḥlām al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1982), 237.

[299] Al-Misallātī, *Layl al-jaddāt*, 57-58.

[300] Ibid., 58.

the owl to her own imaginings. Interpreting the bird as an evil omen, she summons the local diviner, Sa'da, a terrifying figure, described as '*imra'at al-ghayb*' (the woman of the unknown world).[301] In many ways, Sa'da functions similarly to al-Nayhūm's al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq, a fearful presence standing between boy and bird. Declaring herself in need of various parts of the owl for her potions, she resolves to catch it, and a slapstick scene of pursuit follows.

Once the owl is caught, however, amusement transforms to pathos as the boy is reminded of his own encounters with the diviner, when forced to submit to her remedies. The language in which he describes these encounters is laden with the dichotomy of predator and prey as, in her clutch, he transforms into a 'gaping fish', while she is a 'viper, slithering slowly towards me'.[302] Moved to sympathetic pity for the owl, the boy's fears evaporate, and the title of Chapter Four, '*Tā'ir al-faz*ʿ', is strikingly contrasted to that of Chapter Seven, '*Ṣayd al-'ajā'iz*' ('The Old Ladies' Prey'):

> I leaned forward and spotted the owl squashed into a small, dirty sack, tied around its neck with a long piece of string so only its head showed... In the warm sunlight I realised that it was just a bird (*al-būma mujarrad ṭā'ir*). I wanted to help it, to free it from its prison. It seemed that its staring eyes were communicating a subdued plea for help.[303]

At the end of their encounter, the owl's gaze shifts to one of simple, physical suffering with which the child sympathises. He cannot, nevertheless, rescue it from Sa'da's clutches as she whisks it back to her dark 'lair'.[304] In this way, through the drama of grandmother, child and diviner, the owl comes to symbolise unease over the

[301] Ibid., 70.
[302] Ibid., 72-74.
[303] Ibid., 97.
[304] Ibid.

discourses to which the child is exposed, tying him into 'unseen worlds' of fear, rather than simple apprehensions of creaturely empathy and companionship.

In the following chapter, '*Naḥw al-samā*" ('Up to the Sky'), the entire fraught drama is then contrasted to the boy's renewed relationship with sky and birds, expressed through Qur'ānic terms, bordering on the Sufi: 'I lay, contemplating *Allāh's* broad heavens (*samā' Allāh al-wāsi'*), enchanted by its pure daylight blue and starry, moonlit night. I disappeared into its endless expanses for hours on end, watching birds circle across it'.[305] In this image, the grandmother's terrifying manipulation of the 'invisible world', and her blurring of human, animal and jinn, are contrasted to the grandson's simple absorption in the physical and spiritual world around him. While not directly condemning the grandmother's tales, al-Misallātī, like al-Nayhūm, confers the child with an innocent scepticism that challenges them indirectly. In many of his short stories, too, this perspective is similarly adopted, with children, like that of al-Nayhūm's '*Rajā' min al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq*', serving as detectives, uncovering the absurdity and abuse of figures of power, from parents to the *fgi* (*faqīh*).[306] The owl, in a strikingly similar manner to the Eid sheep, becomes representative of this process, bound up in superstitions, which the child moves beyond. In al-Aṣfar's *Sharmūla*, meanwhile, negotiation of folklore and superstition becomes yet subtler, as legend and the mythical unknown are portrayed with nostalgia, while also juxtaposed to the alternative knowledge conveyed by a boy's care of a bird.

A Happy Hoopoe and a Different Kind of Story

Born in 1961, al-Aṣfar, like al-Misallātī, grew up in Benghazi, and has written for major newspapers in the Arab world and outside it, while also publishing over fourteen

[305] Ibid., 107.

[306] Muḥammad al-Misallātī, *Tafāṣīl al-yawm al-'ādī* (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2006), 25.

novels and several collections of short stories. The majority of his work has been published outside Libya, and is often dark and elusive in nature, addressing the nature of individual lives within a tyrannical regime, and often daringly attacking Gaddafi's oppressive policies. *Sharmūla* exemplifies his elusive style, and, like *Layl al-jaddāt*, can only loosely be called a novel. It is, like the traditional Libyan salad after which it is named, composed of a mix of satirical, and often tragicomic, anecdotes from life in Benghazi, and reflections on politics, society and literature. Told from the perspective of an adult author, potentially al-Aṣfar himself, it also dwells in childhood memories. I focus on an episode relating a summer that the narrator spends with his grandmother in the country, presenting numerous parallels to *Layl al-jaddāt*.

Having been given a bird trap by his older cousins, the narrator describes how his grandmother warns him against capturing a hoopoe, which, she tells him, is a 'saintly bird' (*ṭayr murābiṭ*), bringing '*Allāh's* blessing' (*bashāra mubāraka*).[307] If he catches one, she urges, he must give it water and release it immediately. Her words, tying the bird into spiritual legend, instantly render the boy obsessed with catching it. First, he desires to win his grandmother's admiration:

> It is great to catch a crested bird and then set it free; it will go into all the grandmothers' history books. All the grandmothers of the world will be talking about this not-so-evil act of catching a hoopoe. Mother Eve, the apple-lover, will also smile. Scheherazade, the great storyteller, will use it in her stories that defy the arrogance of kings.[308]

Second, the boy wishes to ask the bird about the mystical unknown:

[307] Al-Aṣfar, *Sharmūla*, 113.

[308] Al-Aṣfar, 'The Hoopoe,' 139-140.

> When I catch him, I will not free him right away. I will ask him many questions that have been plaguing me for a long time, and whose answers only he can provide: questions about the future, of such kind as: When...? How...? How much...? Does...? Where...? etc. These answers will heal the wounds of my obscurity (*jirāh ghumūḍī*) and the ulcers of my perplexity (*qurūḥ ḥayratī*).[309]

The boy's curiosity reflects wider Arabic traditions, associating the hoopoe with knowledge of *al-ghayb*, primarily through its role as Solomon's messenger in the Qur'ān (27:20-29). Reference to the 'wounds of my obscurity' (*jirāh ghumūḍī*) and 'ulcers of my perplexity' (*qurūḥ ḥayratī*) further tie the bird into Sufi discourses.

The hoopoe, however, refuses to be caught, with its calm judgement emphasised as it moves 'a reasonable distance' (*amtār ma'qūla*) away from the approaching boy.[310] This elusiveness provokes a 'burning desire' (*tawq 'anīf*) within him, and he pursues it obsessively, until, at the end of summer, he finally catches one.[311] Hope for acquiring spiritual revelation is, however, swiftly shattered as he realises he has blinded the bird, whose eyes, 'covered with a film of dust' and 'brimming with tears', sadly contrast its legendary ability to see into the unknown.[312] The boy begins to care for the blinded bird, feeding him, protecting him from other animals, and spending hours with him, while his grandmother tells him the story of Solomon and the hoopoe. Her vivid story-telling brings the characters to life before him, but only makes him sadder about his own bird: 'I contemplate King Solomon's hoopoe and my blind hoopoe, and I feel sad'.[313]

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[309] Al-Aṣfar 'The Hoopoe,' 140; *Sharmūla*, 116.
[310] Ibid, 139; 115.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Al-Aṣfar, 'The Hoopoe,' 141.
[313] Ibid., 142.

Nevertheless, the boy's encounter with the vulnerability of the bird, rather than his prophetic powers, becomes another form of knowledge, as he smashes his trap and begins to care for him. Rather than gaining spiritual insight, he perceives that he is helping the bird: 'I notice the hoopoe's happiness as he moves his head and stretches his wings. As he regains his appetite, he pecks at some grains of wheat in one go, and dips his beak in a bowl filled with water'.[314] Roles are further reversed as the child begins to sing for the bird. Ultimately, he expresses their creaturely fellowship, united against the trials of life:

> I do not regret having caught him for that was his fate and mine, too. Every creature (*kull makhlūq*) ought to respect its destiny and deal with it in his own way. *So I take care of the hoopoe and he takes care of me* (*u'āmil al-bu'ba'āb alān mu'āmala jayyida, wa-huwa yu'āmilunī bi-l-mithl*).[315]

As in *Layl al-jaddāt*, their connection also assumes spiritual overtones:

> He is my blind treasure, and I am a seeing failure. We have to coexist one way or another, but let us wait for the coming mornings; they may bring something that will repair our deficiencies or fuse us together (*yamzujunā ba'ḍanā fī-l-ba'ḍ*).[316]

Shifting from its folkloric guise, as a '*ṭayr murābiṭ*' (saintly bird), the hoopoe becomes a creaturely sign, moving the child into alternative insight. The final sentence in the passage, meanwhile, moves, like much of al-Aṣfar's writing, into broader, enigmatic allusion:

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[314] Ibid.

[315] Al-Aṣfar, 'The Hoopoe,' 142, *Sharmūla*, 120. Translation of the sentence in italics is my own, emphasising the reciprocity of the relationship. In Azeriah's translation it appears as, 'I treat the hoopoe well, and he behaves with respect'.

[316] Al-Aṣfar, 'The Hoopoe,' 142-143; *Sharmūla*, 120.

> If the bait is freed, life will be ripe; the worm will dance with pain; the wall gecko will crawl off, wiping away the blood on the ground, and the hoopoe will answer our questions with his tender eyes (*'aynayhi al-ḥanūnatayn*); as to his tongue, it will not be able to provide any answer, not even if we insist and say to him: 'Speak hoopoe, speak!' He will not utter a word, but he opens his beak wide and raises it up so that it will be filled with the sun.[317]

This passage, concluding the encounter between boy and bird, significantly also seems to point to an earlier extract from *Sharmūla*, mentioned in my introduction, and depicting a conversation concerning subversive allegory: 'What is this "worm"? And this "trap"? He's attacking you, Mr Starling, insulting you and all you represent. Consider, for example, the relationship between starlings and worms and think of what is then signified by this "trap"'.[318]

As in so much Libyan fiction, the trap, hoopoe and child of *Sharmūla* evoke broader political contexts, with the freeing of the bait potentially alluding to states of oppression, no doubt from within Gaddafi's regime, and 'other worlds' that might be imagined beyond them, when 'bait is freed'. At the same time, the passage also simply expresses innocent childhood attempts to make sense of life. In *Sharmūla*, as in *Layl al-jaddāt*, grandmothers' tales are vital starting points for this process, arising, like the children's encounters, from a desire to weave the natural world into narrative and read meaning into the gaze of the animal other. However, the power of this gaze, arising from its vulnerability, and perceived through the curtailing of flight, reveals the relativity of all that is claimed about it, and the deeper truth of simple, physical encounter. In my final examinations, this power becomes yet more pronounced, in Sufi texts which directly interweave birdsong with human speech.

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[317] Ibid., 143; 121.

[318] Al-Aṣfar, *Sharmūla*, 218. See pages 21-22 of my introduction.

Birdsong: Embracing the Unintelligible

In my introduction, I cited Aida Bamia, observing the 'semi-Sufi style' of much Libyan fiction.[319] This style, while apparent in both al-Misallātī and al-Aṣfar's writing, is most visible in the allusive work of 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl and Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, drawing frequently on the Sufi '*sirr*' (secret). Both of their work also demonstrates the propensity of Libyan fiction to creaturely immanence, with spirituality subsumed within evocations of animals, rooting narrative in the material. Listening is another central motif, with characters detaching themselves from familiar, human sounds, becoming immersed in nature and silence, and renouncing the need to understand.

Of all Libyan authors, al-Ghazāl, briefly introduced in Chapter One, draws most clearly on Sufi language, often including epigraphs from the Qur'ān or famous Sufi thinker Ibn al-'Arabī (1165-1240). Born and raised in Misrata, al-Ghazāl studied Mechanical Engineering at university, and has continued to work within the field since, while also publishing prolifically. His first novel, *al-Tābūt* (*The Coffin*), was published in 2003, and, since then, he has written two more as well as a collection of short stories. Animals populate his fiction, bearing mystical revelations, and contemplated by outcast individuals in the throes of spiritual revelation, and often of mental illness. Infused with such imagery, his short story '*al-Bukamā*" (2008; 'The Mute') represents a Sufi ode to elusive Truth, providing a striking introduction to the 'creaturely signs' of al-Kūnī's work. Unlike both *Layl al-jaddāt* and *Sharmūla*, it is told in the third-person, depicting a young girl in the coastal city of Derna, and her 'rite of passage manqué'.

In the story, the distinction between the language of birds and that of humans represents a main structuring tension. So immersed is the protagonist in the former that she cannot communicate in the latter, and the story tracks her gradual movement

[319] Bamia, 'African Novel,' 25.

into the animal world, culminating in her suicide. Her connection to birds is first depicted as she climbs onto the roof of her childhood home, away from the violence within. There, and through the remainder of the story, the purity of birdsong is juxtaposed to the 'yelling of humans' (*ṣiyāḥ al-bashar*).[320] Mimicking the birds that flock around her, the 'mute' cannot be cured by any religious figure, even the 'readers of the unknown' (*qurrā' al-ghayb*).[321] With her attention shifting inexorably to the nonhuman, she seeks a lost secret, tracing patterns within 'the language of ants, the cooing of pigeons, insects' nocturnal elegies and the babble of the far-off mountain spring'.[322] The natural world, in turn, becomes receptive to her, with birds flocking to her window, and bringing revelation. Reference is made to ''*ālamuhā al-majhūl*' (their unknown world), as well as '*manṭiq al-tayr*' (the language of birds), also expressed as '*manṭiq majhūl*' (an unknown language) and '*lughat al-'īmā"* (the language of signs).

Most significantly, however, birds convey insight through their creaturely immanence. In one of the story's concluding scenes, the protagonist discovers 'a small, featherless (*'āriyya*) bird, wavering on a branch', its vulnerability emphasised through description of it as 'featherless' and 'exposed to the searing heat'.[323] As she cares for it, the bird becomes central to the girl's search for meaning: 'here was the trace of the sign (*sīmā' al-īmā'*), a being that would bring her to touch the secret (*li-mass al-sirr*)'.[324] Ultimately, the girl, too, strips naked and immerses herself in a mountain spring, rejoining the creaturely world around her both symbolically and literally. Birds, meanwhile, continue to circle above her, their cries described as 'a fearful death call' (*na'ī fāji'*),

[320] Al-Ghazāl, '*al-Bukamā'*,' 76.
[321] Ibid.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid., 87.
[324] Ibid.

concluding their central presence within her journey towards the 'secret', a world beyond this world, which also stands at the heart of al-Kūnī's fiction.[325]

Bird Signs: Plurality, Mysticism and the Creaturely

In an early commentary on al-Kūnī, Roger Allen describes him as a new and 'different voice' within Arabic literature, reflecting the general approach that has been taken to his work.[326] In international scholarship, the roots of al-Kūnī's 'difference' have rarely been sought within Libyan fiction. Despite this, it was there, during the sixties, that he began writing, and, through examining his depiction of birds as 'creaturely signs', his connection to broader Libyan fiction becomes clear. As with al-Nayhūm, I first contextualise these depictions through an overview of his nomadic life and prolific oeuvre, exploring both what unites him with fellow Libyan writers, and sets him apart.

Identifying himself as a Saharan, Tuareg and Libyan author, al-Kūnī was born near Ghadames in North-West Libya in 1948. His first language is Tamasheq, and, despite writing in Arabic, he began learning it only at the age of twelve, after settling in an oasis town for school. In the late 1960s, he moved first to Sabha, the former capital of Fezzan, and then to Tripoli, writing for various local and national newspapers, and becoming involved in the thriving literary scene. Like al-Nayhūm, however, he spent most of the rest of his life outside Libya, leaving for Moscow in 1974, where he studied Comparative Literature at the Gorki Institute. In 1978, he then moved to Warsaw, editing Polish-language periodical, *as-Sadaqa*, before settling in Switzerland in 1994, and then Spain.

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[325] Ibid., 97.

[326] Roger Allen, 'A different voice: The Novels of Ibrāhīm al-Kawnī,' in *Tradition and Modernity in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Issa Boullata and Terri de Young, 151-9 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997).

There is no doubt that al-Kūnī's Tuareg origins distance his work from the more familiar contexts of Libyan fiction. Rather than coastal cities, his fiction takes place almost entirely among nomadic tribes in the desert, and, as Hartmut Fähndrich observes, they provide both his literary inspiration and sense of identity:

> In line with publishing habits, the first two novels by Ibrahim al-Koni translated into German were given the subheading 'Novel from Libya'. The author intervened, asking for a modification. His argument was that political Libya, the modern nation-state, is not the essential origin of his literary work. The desert is his decisive influence. And so the following novels are characterized as 'Novel from the Sahara'.[327]

The Tuareg people, dwelling between Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, have long resisted attempts to nationalise and settle them, and al-Kūnī embraces this spirit of nomadism in his work, developing a philosophy of voluntary exile, transcending borders. Unlike the writing of al-Nayhūm, rooted in Libyan realities, al-Kūnī's fiction is also radically plural, reflecting his diverse heritage and itinerant life. Alongside Tuareg, Sufi and sub-Saharan traditions, he draws on literature and belief systems ranging from Taoism to modern existentialism. While Susan McHugh describes his work as being 'regionally rooted', it therefore also moves across time and places.[328] Furthermore, his novels have been translated into thirty-five languages, and, unlike al-Nayhūm, he is widely known outside Libya, perhaps due both to the familiar traditions upon which he draws, and the unfamiliar context of the Sahara in which he dramatises them.

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[327] Hartmut Fähndrich, 'The Desert as Homeland and Metaphor,' in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010), 331.
[328] Susan McHugh, 'Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim al-Koni's "Composite Apparition",' *Comparative Critical Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 287.

Despite this rich plurality and hybridity, however, al-Kūnī's formation as a writer undeniably took place in Libya, and, throughout his three-volume autobiography, *'Udūs al-surā* (2012; *Night Wanderer*),[329] he testifies to his strong relationship with the community of Libyan writers that emerged in the 1960s. He writes of al-Nayhūm, in particular, as a 'phenomenon' (*ẓāhira*) and 'legendary character' (*shakhṣiyya usṭūriyya*), whose writing he followed 'ardently' (*bi-shaghaf*), and with whom he forged a lifelong friendship, lasting throughout their years abroad, until al-Nayhūm's death, when al-Kūnī escorted his body back to Benghazi.[330]

Alongside these friendships, al-Kūnī, like his Libyan compatriots, also suffered the consequences of being an intellectual in a dictatorial regime. His *Naqd al-fikra al-thawriyya* (1970; *Critique of Revolutionary Thought*) was the first book to be banned under Gaddafi.[331] Like other Libyan authors, he thereafter retained a precarious relationship with the regime, holding various diplomatic positions in Europe, and treading a fine line in his fiction. While criticised for being apolitical, many of his novels represent searing portraits of tyranny.[332]

His early work, in particular, also explores similar themes to writers of the 'sixties generation'. In his quartet, *al-Khusūf* (1986-88; *The Lunar Eclipse*), for example, the contexts of the emerging nation-state are vividly depicted, from explorations of colonialism to the royal government, and continuing influence of traditional religious figures.[333] In later work, meanwhile, he moves increasingly into the abstract, allegorical

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[329] ''*Udūs*' signifies someone with a great capacity for walking, while '*surā*' indicates a night journey.

[330] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 177-178.

[331] Along with al-Kūnī's other writing from the early 1970s, I have been unable to acquire a copy of *Naqd al-fikra al-thawriyya*.

[332] See Rita Sakr, *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings*, for discussion of al-Kūnī's novel *al-Waram* (2008; *The Tumour*).

[333] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Al-Khusūf (al-Bi'r, al-Wāha, Akhbār al-ṭūfān al-thānī, Nidā' al-waqwāq)* (Limassol: Dār al-Tanwīr li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1991).

and mystical, again paralleling the broader fiction discussed.[334] The Sufism which infuses his writing is, as he recognises, inspired by broader Saharan traditions, emerging through traditions 'bound to the earth' (*laṣīqan bi-l-arḍ*).[335] In a quote concerning his childhood in the desert, and the metaphysical reflection it encouraged within him, however, the affinities of this Sufism to that of other Libyan authors also become clear:

> J'ai grandi dans l'immensité du desert, dans ce vide sans limites qui s'étend à l'infini, jusqu'à la courbe où il rencontre le ciel toujours clair qui est aussi nu que lui. [...] Derrière cette fusion, dans mon enfance déjà, j'ai cherché *Dieu* et par cette notion, avec mon petit entendement, très tôt déjà j'ai compris *l'unité de l'être* [...] Et tous mes romans, mes nouvelles, mes aphorismes [...] constituent la tentative de mettre en mots ce grand mystère: Dieu, l'unité de l'être et la liberté.[336]

The 'petit entendement' that al-Kūnī describes can be identified in many of the childhood narratives discussed so far. As he states, his prolific oeuvre represents a process of drawing nearer to '*l'unité de l'être*' or, in Arabic, *waḥdat al-wujūd*, combining spiritual and literary traditions to do so. Within these many, often competing, traditions, the elusive 'sign' is central. As Fähndrich observes, 'In al-Koni's desert everything is symbolic, impregnated by myth. Every plant and every animal, every grain of sand and every rock points beyond itself'.[337] Most often, 'signs' come in immanent form, with al-Kūnī's 'petit entendement' continued through creaturely, human-animal encounters, disrupting and transcending the broader myths upon which he draws. In this way, while his work combines elements of magic, myth and

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[334] Al-Kūnī, *al-Wāha*, 154.

[335] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 63.

[336] Harmut Fähndrich, 'Ibrahim al-Koni: Le désert e(s)t la vie,' *Feuxcroisés* 4 (2000): 157-8.

[337] Fähndrich, 'Desert as Homeland', 331.

animism, 'mystical realism' is undoubtedly central, and the immanence of 'realism' paramount. As Sperl comments, nature represents the most potent source of revelation in al-Kūnī's work, beyond the realms of human thought.[338]

In tracking animals in al-Kūnī's work, I focus on his early, and 'more immediately approachable', fiction, from the late 1980s to the late 1990s.[339] This is primarily due to parallels between it and the work of other Libyan authors. Returning to the bird, I introduce my discussion with his short story, '*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*' (1990; 'The Golden Bird of Ill Omen'), which presents a striking new perspective on the motif of child and bird.[340] Following this, I shift from childhood to old age, examining the relationship between bird and sheikh in *Wāw al-ṣughrā'*. In it, the song, flight and creaturely vulnerability of birds are woven into the narrative on thematic, structural and syntactic levels, linked, as in al-Ghazāl's '*al-Bukamā*", to abandonment of human language, and of straightforward understanding.

The Many Meanings of a Bird Pursued

As Hélène Claudot-Hawad discusses, many Tuareg metaphors for spiritual insight are derived from the domain of pastoralism, conceptualised as processes of pursuing escaped animals or domesticating wild ones, all of which must be carried out without undue haste or brutality.[341] Almost all my analyses of al-Kūnī concern such pursuits, in which the animal represents an unexpected and fleeting sign, leading humans astray. It is, indeed, rare to find a work of his that does not feature at least one such transformative 'pursuit' (*muṭārada*). Echoing Derrida's famously titled article, 'l'Animal que donc je suis', meaning both 'The animal that I follow' and 'The animal that I am',

[338] Sperl, '"The Lunar Eclipse",' 247.
[339] Allen, 'Rewriting Literary History,' 254.
[340] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, '*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*,' in *al-Qafaṣ*, 51-61 (London: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 1990).
[341] Hélène Claudot-Hawad, *Éperonner le monde: nomadisme, cosmos et politique chez les Touaregs* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 2001), 104.

al-Kūnī's pursuits lead humans towards their fundamental essence, as well as ever-elusive Truth.[342]

'*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*' begins with a quote from Sufi poet Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, describing a devout man distracted from his worship by beautiful birdsong.[343] The story then opens as a desperate mother implores her young son not to follow the enticing call of a mysterious golden bird. Not heeding her, the boy pursues it as it hops a few steps backward, reminiscent of al-Aṣfar's *Sharmūla*. The bird's allure is, however, overwhelmingly powerful, adding dimensions of myth and magic to the child-animal encounter. The boy, 'baffled by longing to grasp it, to possess it', races into the wilderness.[344] The rest of the story is dedicated to exploring the nature of the bird's hold over him, according to the desert's different 'readers of signs'.

As the pursuit begins, the weeping mother interprets the bird as an 'illusion', and a 'messenger of the devil', while the old women of the tribe interpret it as an ill-omen, announcing imminent drought.[345] A flashback, meanwhile, describes the circumstances of the boy's conception, assisted by a pagan soothsayer (*'arrāf*), with the help of mysterious, unseen forces, from which, the soothsayer warns, the boy must be protected at all times. As boy pursues bird, his mother realises that she has neglected to do so, and, when he is found dead, cries out, 'Why did you give him to me if you only wanted to take him away again'.[346] Her call is, however, answered not by forces from the unseen, but Sufi dervishes, lost in ecstatic chants: 'He only takes those He loves, and only gives those He loves'.[347] In this way, the boy's birth and death are ambiguously

[342] Derrida, 'The Animal,' 369.
[343] Al-Kūnī, '*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*,' 51.
[344] Ibid., 52.
[345] Ibid.
[346] Ibid., 59.
[347] Ibid.

tied into different epistemologies, with the bird interpretable equally as a sign of the devil, of unseen forces, and of the divine.

Demonstrating the plurality of sign-readers in al-Kūnī's universe, from 'old women' to 'Sufis' and 'soothsayers', '*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*' suggests that, although these readers often disagree, the different epistemologies which they voice all contain power and truth, deepening and nuancing each other. The bird represents a meeting-point for these epistemologies, channelling the power of *al-ghayb* in a more literal manner than the authors already discussed, while also serving as a mystical symbol of unknowability. In other of al-Kūnī's writings, meanwhile, creaturely vulnerability further becomes central to the animal as sign. This is prominent within *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, in which an old crane is juxtaposed to the transcendent prophecies delivered by birds above.

A Nation from Above and Beyond

Wāw al-ṣughrā is the first of what William Hutchins calls al-Kūnī's 'oasis novels', also comprising *al-Dumya* (1998; *The Puppet*, trans. Hutchins) and *al-Fazzā'a* (1998; *The Scarecrow*, trans. Hutchins).[348] While *Wāw al-ṣughrā* tracks the formation of an oasis community, following a momentous decision to switch from nomadic to settled ways of life, the second and third volumes depict its rise and fall, with the introduction of trading and gold, and the rise of a tyrannical ruler. Set in an unspecified period of history, all three dramatise the philosophy of nomadism around which al-Kūnī's work is constructed, beginning with the central tenet that a community must never settle in one place for more than forty days.

[348] William M. Hutchins, introduction to *New Waw, Saharan Oasis*, by Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī (Austin: The Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, 2014), ix.

Intertwined with settled and nomadic worlds, meanwhile, is the distinction between seen and unseen ones. The 'unseen world' (*'ālam al-khafā'/al-ghayb*), attained only by endless wandering, following 'signs' (*ishārāt*) in search of the 'lost homeland' (*al-waṭan al-ḍā'i'*), signifies freedom and spiritual insight, representing one of what Hutchins calls the 'technical terms' of al-Kūnī's fictional philosophy. In *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, these 'terms' are primarily expressed through birds, mediating between the transcendent heavens and creaturely earth.[349] The novel's first chapter, '*Ahl al-samā*" ('People of the Sky'), opens with a quotation from Blaise Pascal, introducing the epistemological and ontological significance of birds: 'What? Didn't you say the sky and birds prove God's existence?'.[350] The venerable leader of a desert tribe is then depicted reflecting on the song of the 'hidden bird' (*al-ṭā'ir al-khafī*) that has haunted him throughout his life.[351] The potency of the song is attributed to the 'plurality of voices' (*ta'addud al-aṣwāt*) it contains, which cannot be transcribed into the 'language of letters' (*lughat al-ḥurūf*).[352] Furthermore, the tribe leader hears within it 'the tale (*sīra*) of the whole desert', and, in particular, longing for the lost and utopic oasis *Wāw*, a former state of harmony which all creatures, exiled within the desert, long for.

Subtitled '*riwāya fī siyar*' (a novel in tales), some of the most significant 'tales' in *Wāw al-ṣughrā* are conveyed by birds, moving the novel beyond written language into the mysteries of song and flight. Like '*al-Bukamā*", it tends to obfuscation and riddle, indicating al-Kūnī's embrace of oblique Sufi epistemologies, as well as his Tuareg heritage, in which nobility is located in *tangält*, a way of speaking Tamasheq that Elmarsafy describes as 'allusive, figurative, ironic or veiled discourse'.[353] To a large

[349] Ibid., viii.

[350] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Article IV, Section 244.

[351] Al-Kūnī, *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 2.

[352] Ibid.

[353] Elmarsafy, *Sufism*, 116.

extent, *tangält* characterises all of al-Kūnī's 'highly stylized' Arabic.[354] I would further argue that it both defines and is defined by his use of animals, in which language is fundamentally challenged by that which is totally other, from birdsong to the tracks left by desert beasts. In *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, the tantalising presence of birds is principally depicted in two sections, the first evoking the twice yearly arrival of migrating flocks in the desert's nomadic encampments, and the second the companionship between the tribe chief and his old crane.

Almost all of the novel's first four chapters are dedicated to the arrival of migrating flocks in the encampments, in many ways reminiscent of the long, panoramic opening of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf's *al-Nihāyāt* (1977; *Endings*), resembling what Allen describes as 'a camera shot from above, first taking in the general surroundings and gradually zeroing in on more particular details'.[355] In *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, this 'camera shot' is replaced by birds, and their behaviour is depicted alongside that of the people below, with the two 'nations' becoming allegories for one another, and the humans below linked both to the birds' natural migratory patterns and 'unseen' revelations. Description of them is therefore infused with both Sufi terminology and closely-observed physical detail:

> Before deciding to land, groups circle over the camps for a long time and then spread through the gullies and pastures. Desert dwellers have noticed that their zeal increases, their hymns (*anāshīduhā*) grow louder, and their dancing through space (*fī-l-farāgh*) becomes more graceful and beautiful during the hours prior to their descent to the earth.[356]

[354] Ibid., 107.

[355] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 223.

[356] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 6.

The tribe's absorption in the birds is emphasised, alongside the joy that follows the first landing, and the various ways in which, following this, the birds are read as signs. The diviners (*'arrāfūn*), firstly, read them for 'the enigmatic insights (*anbā' majhūla*) the Spirit World (*'ālam al-khafā'*) has encoded in their behaviour, songs, and flight'.[357] The rest of the people, meanwhile, are driven by a 'hidden frenzy' (*al-mass al-khafī*), and begin singing and dancing in a trance.[358] Above all, this 'frenzy' reflects their recognition of the flocks as their celestial double, a 'truth' (*ḥaqīqa*) uttered by the diviners:

> Winged people, you are us. Your Law is migratory (*nāmūsukum asfār*). Our Law is nomadic (*nāmūsunā asfār*). You beat your wings in the sky; we pad over the earth on two feet. You migrate to the nations of the unknown North; we migrate in search of Waw.[359]

Echoing '*Ṭā'ir al-naḥs al-dhahabī*', mothers tell their children that they were brought into the world by birds and will be taken by them too. As Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī observes, the children's future is thus firmly tied into the 'law of nature', while the birds' physical function as guides across the desert also parallels their nature as signs, pointing to the unseen.[360]

To this end, after the birds' departure, the tribe elders spend a night discussing the prophecies hidden in their song, and whether they indicate that the tribe should remain in their camp, or continue their wanderings. Their efforts are, however, inconclusive, and they emerge, defeated, in the morning. As typical of al-Kūnī's work, prophecy comes instead from an entirely unexpected source: a miserable old crane

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[357] Ibid., 3.

[358] Al-Kūnī, *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 11.

[359] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 6.

[360] Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Muḥarramāt qabaliyya: al-muqaddas wa-takhayyulātuhu fī-l-mujtama' al-ra'wī riwā'iyyan* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2008), 172.

(*gharnūq*), too weak to follow the migrating flocks. Exemplifying creaturely vulnerability, and starkly contrasting the grace and mystery of the birds above, the crane reveals how al-Kūnī's work so often fluctuates between planes of being, creating 'an aesthetic that, fully and without compromise, rethinks the place of the transcendent within the immanent'.[361]

A Crane Down and a Different Kind of Sign

The old crane is discovered by a group of children, and described 'squatting on the ridgeline of a tent' and moving like a 'chicken' or 'crow'.[362] The curtailing of his flight is further depicted with great pathos: 'He landed in an embarrassing way, and his noble beak sank into the dirt [...] In his tired, languid eyes the boys saw the gleam and moisture of tears'.[363] Echoing the tribe elders, the boys begin to debate over whether the bird is an omen of good (*bashāra*) or bad (*naḥs*).[364] Agreeing that, because he is old and cannot fly, he represents misfortune, most of them proceed to chase him around.

Soon, however, the tribe leader rescues and befriends the crane, which then becomes a point of contention between him and his chief diviner, who interprets the bird as an omen, warning the tribe to move on: 'Doesn't my master see that the bird has refused to fly not because he can't fly but because he is carrying a prophecy to the encampment?'.[365] Conversely, the leader interprets the bird's lack of flight not as transcendent prophecy, but as conveying the creaturely reality of both his and the crane's approaching death:

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[361] Ziad Elmarsafy, 'Ibrahim al-Koni's Hybrid Aesthetic,' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 39, no. 2 (2012): 198.

[362] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 12.

[363] Ibid., 14.

[364] Al-Kūnī, *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 25-26.

[365] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 18.

> Creatures (*al-makhlūqāt*) when they become senile, when they grow old and become weak and incapacitated, find the earth waiting for them, find that the earth is their destiny, that the earth is their eternal homeland (*takūn al-arḍ waṭanahā al-abadī*), their last resort, even if these creatures are celestial beings (*kā'ināt samāwiyya*), even if these creatures are one of the sky's communities like the birds![366]

Contrasting the celestial truths of the birds above, the leader concludes that 'The senile bird was the sign (*al-ṭā'ir al-harim huwa al-'ilāma*)'.[367] As 'sign', the crane, like many of the Eid sheep explored in Chapter One, therefore points to mortality, not through the brutal terms of slaughter, but simply the inevitability of aging.

Despite this difference, the leader cares for the bird, his 'boon companion' (*anīs*), with all the innocence of the children discussed: 'In his lap he placed a piece of barley bread, which he started to crumble in his hands, throwing morsels to the bird'.[368] Later, he is described grooming the bird's feathers, with 'the affection (*ḥanān*) of a mother combing her virgin daughter's hair on her wedding night'.[369] In many ways, the short-lived companionship between them provides light relief from the rest of the narrative, which, like so much of al-Kūnī's work, is dominated by debate concerning signs and philosophies. Juxtaposed to these debates, old man and bird offer a creaturely fellowship, paralleling Pick's description: 'Fellowship is ridiculous, ungainly, carnivalesque even – but solid and unquestioning. It is rooted in bodies exposed to time and [...] at the mercy of gravity'.[370] Even after the crane dies, he brings out an 'ungainly' side in the leader, leading him to rebel against the stern edicts of the

[366] Al-Kūnī, 15; *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 28.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid, 30; 53.
[370] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 188.

council, and the need to retain a dignified demeanour at all times: 'The leader guffawed again, laughing sarcastically. Then he embraced the dead bird and asked, "What's the point of all this, given that we're setting out tomorrow, or perhaps today?"'[371] At the end of his life, the bird causes the leader to rebel against the duties and conventions long imposed on him, and to regain childhood innocence and insight.

This further emerges through the second bird which haunts the leader, the 'hidden bird' (*al-ṭā'ir al-khafī*) introduced in the novel's first pages, and which represents the crane's celestial double.[372] This bird is, furthermore, described as his 'lost bird' (*ṭā'irahu al-mafqūd*), expressing his longing to escape community and be a poet in the wilderness.[373] Such was his existence, in 'the distant grazing lands', until the death of his uncle led him to be elected leader.[374] As he directs the community, the 'hidden bird' remains, calling him into the wild, and representing poetic inspiration, passionate love and the call of a 'lost childhood, which he had thought time and old age would never return to him'.[375] The 'invisible bird' is further said to transport the leader to a 'space (*makān*) where space does not exist' and 'a time (*zamān*) that had not yet developed into time'.[376] Its juxtaposition to the crane, embodying rootedness and physicality, therefore reveals the constant movement of al-Kūnī's work between immanence and transcendence.

Within *Wāw al-ṣughrā* as a whole, this movement is also reflected in the contrast between the 'space where space does not exist', evoked through birds above, and the physicality of the earth below, portrayed though the character of the '*ḥaffār*' (the excavator), and his passionate love for soil, stone and water. Following the leader's

[371] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 31.
[372] Al-Kūnī, *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 7.
[373] Ibid., 47.
[374] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 23.
[375] Ibid., 22.
[376] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 22; *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, 41.

death, his is one of many 'tales' (*siyar*) told, embedded in the earth, which, like birdsong, is said to 'speak to him in many tongues' (*bi-alsina kathīra*).[377] His affection goes back to childhood: 'In that period – the days of childhood, play, and innocence – the earth was very close. He would crawl outside to play between the tent sites, plunge into her dirt and clay, and smear his face with her sand'.[378] Like the leader, he is also mocked and at odds with the wider community. Torn between respecting the otherness of the earth's language, and struggling to decipher it, the 'excavator', like al-Ghazāl's mute, loses the ability to communicate, and, in the description of his love for the earth, which Hutchins describes as a 'virtuoso piece of Arabic lyrical prose', al-Kūnī's writing literally communicates from within the elements:

> He would run his fingers over the smooth slabs to feel the moist viscosity. He would lick the ends of his fingers with the tip of his tongue, savouring the salinity, the array of metals, the mix of soils, and the sweetness of the torrents' waters in turn.[379]

While being immersed in the elements below and the birds above, *Wāw al-ṣughrā* concludes with the formation of a settled community, transgressing the dictates of nomadic law. Following the leader's death, the elders elect that he will remain their ruler, and build a tomb for him, around which the community grows, its history related over the next two novels. Most significantly, this community stands in stark contrast to the flocks of birds that begin the novel, and that, as al-Ṭaḥāwī remarks, set its plot en route.[380] It also contrasts the legendary 'lost homeland', whose name, *Wāw*, ironically reflects that of the new community.

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[377] Ibid., 125; 210.

[378] Al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 125.

[379] Hutchins, introduction to *New Waw*, vii; al-Kūnī, *New Waw*, 132.

[380] Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Muḥarramāt*, 171.

The next two novels depict this community's rise and fall, as al-Kūnī's work shifts from immersion in the incommunicable language of the elements to visions of power and its abuse, pointing both to the injustice of human systems, and what transcends them, as Hutchins comments:

> Although many of his novels seem allegorical, they are better described as reverse allegories: excellent examples of many different things offered for the reader's creative use. One reader may, for example, choose to consider the almost Satanic leader in *The Tumor* and *The Scarecrow* as an allusion to Colonel Qaddafi, and the brave new community of New Waw may stand for Libya. Another equally perceptive reader may be brooding about some other time or place.[381]

Al-Kūnī's work indeed encourages 'signs' to be read in different ways, hinting at what lies beyond human meaning, and transcends time and place. Childhood and old age represent states particularly close to spiritual truth, and more susceptible to the call of elusive animals, paralleling wider Libyan fiction, where companionships between the elderly and animals are also prominent.[382] So strongly do such states characterise al-Kūnī's thought, meanwhile, that he reads even the work of rational, satirical al-Nayhūm as expressive of a momentous, ungraspable 'secret'. In an article on this 'secret', written in 1969, al-Kūnī describes his fascination with the older author, providing an insight into both his own intellectual development, and an alternative perspective on al-Nayhūm's work.[383] Before summing up my broader reflections on Libyan fiction, I therefore briefly examine how this reading may inform the more

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[381] Hutchins, introduction to *New Waw*, x.

[382] See: Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*,' in Sālim al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj*, 101-106; 'Aqīla, *al-Jirāb*, 24; and 'Abdallāḥ al-Quwayrī, '*al-Rajul wa-l-ḥamāma*,' in *al-Zayt wa-l-Tamr*, 27-34 (Tunis: Dār al-Maghrib al-'Arabī, 1967).

[383] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, '*Wa-l-shi'r ayḍan yaktub al-Nayhūm*,' in Sālim al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj*, 71-72.

obvious divergences between the authors, and provide insight into the place of animals as symbols and 'creaturely signs' within Libyan imaginings of growing-up and growing-up gone wrong.

Creaturely Signs: Symbols and the Secrets Within

From my analyses, distinctions between the two authors have undoubtedly already become evident, first and foremost in their approach to nation and community. While al-Nayhūm was an activist, committed to changing social realities, al-Kūnī's philosophy, mirroring the leader in *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, is based in transcendent prophecy and retreat from the traumas of society. While al-Nayhūm depicts children as the nation's hopeful future, al-Kūnī portrays their particular susceptibility to the call of 'other worlds'. In many ways, al-Nayhūm's work represents an allegory of nation, as he literally strives to direct its course, while al-Kūnī's represents a 'post-national impulse'.[384]

Both are further divided in their attitudes to *al-ghayb*. Unlike al-Nayhūm, who critiqued its coercive and manipulative uses, al-Kūnī embraces the 'hidden world' in all its elusiveness and irrationality, representing freedom from 'reason' (*manṭiq*), which, for him, is synonymous with ideology. While studying in Moscow, he describes how magical realism, exemplified in the work of Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and Gabriel García Márquez (1927-2014), provided a means for him to contest the ideologies of both Soviet Russia and Gaddafi's Libya.[385] In this way, all the magical terms that al-Nayhūm imbues with satire in *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* – from '*lughat al-ṭuyūr*' (the language of birds) to '*khabāyā mamlakat al-jānn*' (the treasures of the jinn kingdom) and '*ʻulūm al-awwalīn*' (the knowledge of the ancestors) – are imbued with the utmost significance in al-Kūnī's

[384] Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia in the Arabic Novel: Nation-state, Modernity and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 225-6.
[385] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 400-402.

work, employed as a means of overturning oppressive ideologies, and the 'standard narratives of secular modernism'.[386]

In their use of animals and symbolism, the two are therefore sharply divided. In contrast to al-Nayhūm's tightly controlled allegories, al-Kūnī deploys metaphor, symbol and sign in a process of endless deferral, infusing the animal with the unsayable dimensions of *al-ghayb*, and infusing narrative with the elemental. Responding to criticism that his work tends to be repetitive, he describes it as a necessity, struggling towards a fleeting truth: 'J'ai créé mon propre désert avec mes propres symboles. J'ai fixé des archetypes [...] Ils se répètent mais pour dire toujours quelque chose de plus'.[387] Elsewhere, he explicitly links metaphor and sign as involved in processes of veiling and unveiling:

> It is with Metaphor that the real history of creative writing began. It is with Metaphor that the transformation of the world into a symbol began. With the Metaphor began the activity of solemn veiling, of making of human existence metaphorical material expelled from its visible homeland [...] The Metaphor was given the quality of suggestion, comparable to what Muslim Sufis see in the 'sign' (*āya*) [...] It is the role of Metaphor to grasp the world in its real, its religious being.[388]

In many ways, al-Kūnī's words echo those of Berger, cited in my introduction to Part One, and evoking metaphor as a search for lost origins, a 'religious being' that connects

[386] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, ''*An al-nasr al-siḥrī al-adyaḍ*,' in *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*, 41. Ziad Elmarsafy, 'Ibrahim al-Koni's Hybrid Aesthetic,' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 39, no. 2 (2012), 198.
[387] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, 'Le discours du désert (témoignage),' in *La poétique de l'espace dans la literature arabe moderne*, ed. Boutros Hallaq, Robin Ostle and Stefan Wild (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 97.
[388] Fähndrich, 'Desert as Homeland,' 335.

all.[389] The animal becomes a central vehicle in this process, dramatising the most creaturely aspects of human existence, which then become powerful, spiritual truths.

Despite these evident differences, however, al-Kūnī intriguingly, and at length, describes having sensed a 'momentous secret' (*sirr khaṭīr*) within al-Nayhūm's precise, satirical allegories. In '*Wa-l-shi'r ayḍan yaktub al-Nayhūm*' (1969; 'al-Nayhūm Writes Poetry Too'), he describes a 'mysterious pulse' (*nabḍ ghāmiḍ*) pulling him to the writings of the 'satirical philosopher'.[390] Sensing beneath his humour, and the clarity of his symbolic thought, an 'obscure' (*ghāmiḍ*) essence that lingered in his thoughts, he read his articles again and again in order to grasp this 'gleaming, hidden thing' (*hādhā al-shay' al-wāmiḍ al-khafī*).[391]

Eventually, al-Kūnī found the answer through al-Nayhūm himself. Quoting an interview between him and al-Nayhūm, he emphasises how the latter refers to the 'naïve Sufism' that animates much of his work, fostered by 'dream' (*al-ḥulm*), the 'stuff of poetry' (*mādat al-shi'r*).[392] This, for al-Kūnī, is what shines through the cleverly constructed symbolism of al-Nayhūm's work, and he decribes his 'Sufi philosophy' as 'rebellious, wild and clamorous'.[393] In my next chapters, I expand on al-Kūnī's observations, bringing together both authors' most famous novels, in which human-animal encounter, in particular, represents a locus of poetry, dream, spiritual encounter and creaturely symbolism, as outcast figures negotiate, contest and transcend the discourses imposed on animals. In many ways, these novels represent continuations of the theme of rite-of-passage manqué explored in this part, as well as the manner in which animals are employed as signs. While defined by human meaning,

[389] Berger, *Why Look*, 52. See page 59 of my introduction to Part One.
[390] Al-Kūnī, '*Wa-l-shi'r*,' 71-2.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid., 73.
[393] Ibid.

these animals, through children, and other readers of 'creaturely signs', both critique current realities, and, through the secrets hinted at beneath symbolic surfaces, lead into elusive 'other worlds'.

Conclusion

Most authors discussed in this part clearly tend to al-Kūnī's more explicitly creaturely depiction of animals, as well as its stronger connection to *al-ghayb*. While their work, unlike his, is predominantly realist, animals signify a shift to alternative epistemologies and worlds, and a refusal or inability to accept society's conventions. In the case of the bird, this becomes an issue of discourse and epistemology, juxtaposing both specific 'stories', and human language in general, to the physicality of the trapped bird and elusiveness of its song. What further unites all the authors of Chapter Two, as well as several in Chapter One, is the theme of feeding and caring for the animal. In all, this represents simple fellowship, in contrast to the complexities of the wider narratives, and a tenderness lacking in human relationships. In Part Two, this simple ethics will continue to be central, in more comprehensive explorations of human community and the possibility of building harmony within and beyond it.

Part 2 – Survival: The Collapse of Community and Call of the Creaturely

'*No beast (dābba) there is on earth but its livelihood (rizq) rests with God. He knows its berth and its final resting place. All is in a manifest Book*'.[394]

A popular Libyan expression goes that 'the luckless finds bones in a stomach' (*rāqid al-rīḥ yalqā al-'aẓm fī-l-karsh*). The term for 'luckless', the idiomatic '*rāqid al-rīḥ*' – literally, 'he who lies upon the wind' – signifies someone with no family, shelter or possessions, aptly embodying the characters discussed in this part. In English, the expression could be rendered 'going from bad to worse', but is closer to 'going from little to less', echoing the empty-handedness of Libyan fiction, always moving to a zero-point of possession, where the complexities and conundrums of existence shift to those of survival. In one of Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's earliest novels, *al-Wāḥa* (1988; *The Oasis*), for example, a story is told of a deadly frost that strikes the desert. So as not to freeze to death, a goatherd begins rolling a rock up a mountain, only to let it fall to the bottom again and begin rolling it up once more.[395] Echoing Albert Camus' *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942; *The Myth of Sisyphus*), the anecdote demonstrates how the demands of temperature, hunger and thirst define Libyan fiction, shifting from reflections on the absurdity of existence to the necessities of survival, which become an alternative ethical prism for the world.

'Survival narratives', I suggest, form a distinct canon in Libyan fiction, paralleling what, in Egyptian fiction, Samah Selim, among others, has explored as the defining

[394] Qur'ān 11:6, trans. Tarif Khalidi.

[395] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *al-Wāḥa*, 185. *Al-Wāḥa* is the second part of al-Kūnī's quartet *al-Khusūf* (1988-1989; *The Lunar Eclipse*).

features of agricultural imagery and the figure of the *fallāh* (peasant), embodying national identity, connections to the past and possibilities for the future.[396] Selim describes such narratives as 'a canon that crystallises an ongoing social and textual dialogue'.[397] Across the border, Libyan fiction is characterised by the subsistence survivor, whose profession – whether fisherman, water carrier or goatherd – is of less significance than his precarious existence, always hunting for the next 'crust of bread'. The expressions '*kisrat khubz*' (scrap of bread), '*rizq*' (sustenance), '*sadd al-ramaq*' (bare survival) and '*luqmat al-'aysh*' (daily bread) frequently recur. Furthermore, the survivor is never far from animals, whether battling them, empathising with their similar state of subsistence or seeing in them a moral ideal of restraint. The environment, meanwhile, represents not something to be harnessed for the smooth running of society, but a force which reveals its fallacies and excesses, and uncovers the vulnerability shared by all creatures.

In this part, such 'narratives of survival' are my focus, and I move from fleeting childhood companionships to larger scale encounters, in which the moral predicaments of adulthood are negotiated. From the most basic considerations, of who deserves life and why, human-animal encounters are tied into a broader commentary on the nation, the environment and the forces of tradition and modernity acting upon both. Rite-of-passage manqué thus shifts into visions of failure to move beyond subsistence, while the possibility of founding a society on anything other than violence to the 'other' is questioned. Sustained visions of animal communities, meanwhile, are productive of 'other worlds' that dramatise a 'creaturely ethics' of empty-handedness. Through this ethics, established hierarchies and ideologies are challenged, and subsumed within an intertwined Qur'ānic, Sufi and environmental interconnectivity,

[396] Samah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (Richmond: Curzon Press Limited, 2004), 1.
[397] Ibid., 24.

inspired by concepts of *arḍ Allāh* (God's land) and *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness-of-being), and evocations of *Allāh* as provider of *rizq*, seen in Qur'ān 11:6 above. As in Part One, Anat Pick's 'creaturely poetics' will inform my readings of this ethics, in particular her notion of 'creaturely attention', arising from 'exposure' to time, gravity and the elements, and representing a state of mind 'whose consequences for our thoughts on justice and for the possibilities of art are surely extraordinary'.[398]

To introduce 'survival narratives', I consider prominent novels by three of Libya's best-known and most prolific authors: al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm (1937-1994); Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī (b. 1948); and Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh (b. 1942). Each of their novels focuses on encounters between humans and animals in situations of subsistence survival. *Min Makka ilā hunā* (1970; *From Mecca to Here*) by al-Nayhūm was published serially in the late 1960s, and is one of the first Libyan novels, as well as the most influential, provoking a wave of public discussion upon its publication, with writers still testifying to its impact today.[399] Al-Faqīh's *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* (2000; *Homeless Rats*, 2011), meanwhile, was initially published in instalments in 1966, but remained unfinished until 2000.[400] Finally, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* (1989; *The Bleeding of the Stone*, trans. May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley, 2002), launched al-Kūnī to fame not only within Libyan fiction, but within wider Arabic and world literature.[401] More attention has been paid to this novel's environmental concerns than any other Arabic fiction, yet none has identified its concerns with those of other Libyan fiction.

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[398] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 188.

[399] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2001).

[400] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 2000); trans., *Homeless Rats* (London: Quartet Books, 2011).

[401] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 2005); trans. May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley, *The Bleeding of the Stone* (Gloucestershire: Arris Books, 2003).

Despite this, there are striking parallels in theme and aesthetics between the three novels, particularly in their treatment of animals. All three are set in Libya, between the 1930s and 1950s, before, or shortly after, Independence, as well as before oil and Gaddafi, when survival against drought and famine remained the top priority. In their depictions of the nascent nation, animals feature prominently, commenting on possessions, borders, rights and citizenship and elaborating an ethics of restraint and hospitality. In all, this emerges through hybrid aesthetics, combining sections of beast fable with realism, symbolism and myth. Paring down narratives of nation to a level of reflection both creaturely and spiritual, both basic and profound, the novels offer numerous points of comparison, in particular, and unexpectedly, between al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī. In both their novels, spirituality and the environment become entwined, representing domains that transcend and challenge humans' endurance and structures of thought. To explore this further, I briefly introduce the broader spatial impulse in Libyan fiction, and the heterotopic 'other worlds' through which it emerges.

Geographies of Subsistence: Nation, Environment and Animals

The dichotomies of desert and civilisation, country and city, represent a major feature of literary criticism of Arabic fiction, and have been explored in terms of modernity, identity and post-coloniality.[402] Above all, this criticism indicates what Richard van Leeuwen notes as a 'marked preoccupation with issues of space' in Arabic literature, with geographies, whether urban or rural, inscribed within structures of power, as well as the potent force of nature itself.[403] In Libyan fiction, the city is not only juxtaposed

[402] See, for example, Robin Ostle, 'Town and Country in Modern Arabic Literature,' *UFSI Reports* 36 (1982): 1-8; Roger Allen, 'The mature Arabic novel outside Egypt,' in *Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M. Badawi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 207-209; and Sabry Hafez, 'The Novel of the Desert, poetics of Space and Dialectics of Freedom,' in *La poétique de l'espace dans la literature arabe moderne*, ed. Boutros Hallaq, Robin Ostle and Stefan Wild, 55-84 (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002).
[403] Richard Van Leeuwen, 'Cars in the Desert: Ibrāhīm al-Kawnī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Munīf and André Citroën.' *Oriente Moderno* 77 nos. 2/3 (1997): 60.

to the wilderness, but, within the wilderness, humans are juxtaposed to animals. In this way, struggle against oppression is consistently juxtaposed to struggle of a creaturely, and often spiritual, nature. While Ethan Chorin remarks on the absence of concrete 'places' from modern Libyan fiction, it is, rather, the institutions of modern nation that disappear, while grimly real geographies are eminently present, and central to the portrayal of 'other worlds'.[404]

Even compared to other Arab nations, Libya's geography is extreme: 95% desert, with only 0.5% of remaining land cultivated in mountain and coastal areas and oases.[405] Its climate, too, is violently changeable and frequently exposed to droughts, flooding and forest fires, alongside the seasonal *qiblī* and *khamāsīn* winds.[406] For evident reasons, nature is not an idealised realm in Libyan fiction, but a place fraught with conflict and struggle. In many authors' work, depiction of the natural world lies within what Terry Gifford identifies as the post-pastoral, combining:

> [...] awe leading to humility in the face of the creative and destructive forces of nature; awareness of the culturally loaded language we use about the country; accepting responsibility for our relationship with nature and its dilemmas; recognition that the exploitation of nature is often accompanied by the exploitation of the less powerful people who work with it, visit it or less obviously depend upon its resources.[407]

In Libyan survival narratives, humans, animals and the elements are locked in intense encounters, with the environment representing a domain against which creatures must struggle, while also a domain to be taken seriously in its own right. Often, it is

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[404] Chorin, *Translating Libya*, 4.

[405] John Wright, *A History of Libya* (New York: Columbia University Press 2010), xiii.

[406] Ibid., xiii-xv.

[407] Terry Gifford, 'Pastoral, Antipastoral, and Postpastoral as Reading Strategies,' in *Critical Insights: Nature and the Environment*, ed. Scott Slovic (Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2013), 45-46.

depicted as transcending human control, infused with divine agency and reducing humans to one creature among many. At the same time, it is tainted by the marks of political conflict and economic exploitation, impacting upon both human and animal life.

Oil, above all, must be read as a subtext to 'survival narratives'. *Min Makka ilā hunā*, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* were, for example, all written at a time when Libya was rapidly enriched, with per capita income rising from $25-35 in 1951 to $2,000 in 1969.[408] Despite this, they are set at a time when the United Nations recognised Libya as the poorest nation in the world with scant chances of development, as stated by its then economist, Benjamin Higgins: 'Libya combines within the borders of one country virtually all the obstacles to development that can be found anywhere: geographic, economic, political, sociological, technological'.[409]

Despite being set in the pre-oil era, the novels of al-Nayhūm, al-Faqīh and al-Kūnī clearly comment upon the subsequent development of the country, from its dramatically increasing consumerism to its reliance on foreign imports and embrace of new technologies. Both in their fiction and beyond it, the authors have made their environmental concern clear. In a 1978 interview, al-Nayhūm, for example, argues that the environmental issues facing Libya are, in his view, greater than the social ones, stating that, 'al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq must exist first and foremost'.[410] In many of his articles, meanwhile, he discusses how to develop sustainable revenues and sources of energy beyond oil, and this concern may also be read within his *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl* (1969; *Some Children's Stories*). The first story, ''*An Marākib al-sulṭān*' ('Of the Sultan's Ships'), for example, depicts the arrival of two foreigners in an ancient, fertile city, with a *fgi*

[408] Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 62.
[409] Benjamin Howard Higgins, *The Economic and Social Development of Libya* (New York: United Nations Technical Assistance Programme, 1953), 37.
[410] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 36.

arriving from the west, and a farmer from the east. Under the advice of the *fgi*, warning of a forthcoming desert wind, the sultan and his people abandon the city, while the farmer remains to plant dates, adapting to the new climate.[411] While Chorin describes the story as 'a strangely prescient allegory for Gaddafi's rule', and particularly his rapprochement with the West, it points more directly to the allure of oil companies and quick wealth.[412]

Nevertheless, many other survival novels and stories do, indeed, represent both broad environmental critiques, and specific counter-discourses to Gaddafi's agricultural rhetoric, visible in the rural ideal depicted in his own short stories, as well as ambitious projects such as the Great Manmade River (*al-Nahr al-ṣinā'ī al-'aẓīm*) that has been described as 'grandiose, functioning for a while, but ultimately not viable'.[413] Such intrusive policies and ostentatious rhetoric are, for example, indicated by author 'Umar al-Kiddī (b. 1959) in his short story '*Jālib al-maṭar*' (2012; 'The Bringer of Rain'):

> First he (Gaddafi) confiscated tribal lands and established agricultural projects in various locations. Then he began appearing on television every night, driving tractors, patrolling through long, green spikes of grain, contemplating Frisian cattle imported from Holland as they munched their way voraciously through fodder or, on occasion, shearing sheep in a large tent as shepherds raised their voices in Bedouin song.[414]

In response to such images, Libyan survival narratives portray foreign presences entering peripheral patches of land and imposing their needs and will upon them,

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[411] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, ''*An marākib al-sulṭān*,' in *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*, 11-20.
[412] Chorin, *Exit Gaddafi*, 1-2.
[413] Mu'ammar Gaddafi, *Al-Qarya al-qarya, al-arḍ al-arḍ wa-intiḥār rā'id al-faḍā' wa-qiṣaṣ ukhrā* (London: Riad el-Rayyes Books, 1995); Chorin, *Exit Gaddafi*, 14.
[414] 'Umar al-Kiddī, '*Jālib al-maṭar*,' in *Hurrās al-jaḥīm: majmū'a qiṣaṣiyya* (Tripoli: Wizārāt al-Thaqāfah wa-l-Mujtama' al-Madanī, 2013), 146.

allegorising both Gaddafi and the many commercial and military forces that have similarly disrupted Libya's landscape. In each, the land is resistant, and it is within this intense environment that encounters between humans and animals are staged and nostalgia expressed for a time when the battle for survival, however harsh, was honest and did not upset the natural balance. Each narrative reflects the fragile interconnectivity of the desert environment and the fact that, as al-Nayhūm puts it, 'coexistence with the desert' (*al-ta'āyush ma'a al-ṣaḥrā'*) is necessary, rather than forcing it to the will of power-mad rulers and occupiers.[415]

In sum, the fiction may be seen within the perspective of what Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt refer to as 'Narratives of Survival, Sustainability and Justice', in which the difficulties of livelihood, rather than specific ecocritical agendas, lead to environmental concern.[416] Moving beyond the North American discourses, which have largely dominated the field of ecocriticism, such narratives reveal its interconnectedness with the postcolonial concerns that have long remained separate from it. In Rob Nixon's seminal essay on the subject, he identifies how each field has traditionally been driven by opposing reading strategies, with postcolonialism emphasising history, hybridity and cosmopolitanism, and ecocriticism tending to efface history and celebrate purity.[417] Libyan fiction, as will be seen, combines elements of both, with the vast timelessness of the wilderness home to struggles between species, tribes and nations, caught between visions of fundamental unity and hybrid, heterotopic 'other worlds'. In many ways, it therefore struggles against the

[415] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 35.

[416] Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, 'Introduction: Narratives of Survival, Sustainability and Justice,' in *Under the Sign of Nature: Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives*, ed. Bonnie Hunt, Alex Hunt and John Tallmadge (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 1.

[417] Rob Nixon, 'Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,' in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 235.

'cartographic impulse' noted in many works of Arabic fiction, upsetting straightforward notions of identity, borders and possession.[418]

Heterotopias of the Nonhuman: Animal Ethics through Hybrid Aesthetics

So far, I have employed the concept of 'other worlds' to refer to the propensity of Libyan fiction to move from nation and human community into visions of shared, creaturely suffering, and of longing for a time of former innocence. In this part, I expand on the notion through considering both ethics and aesthetics, drawing on what Michel Foucault terms 'heterotopias' or 'counter-sites', where the real sites and systems found within a culture are 'represented, contested, and inverted'.[419] Every culture, Foucault suggests, has its heterotopias, spaces, whether real or imaginary, where diverse elements interact, in often impossible juxtapositions, providing new perspectives on the functioning of dominant culture, and populated by individuals in crisis with society.

Foucault lists prisons, asylums and boarding schools, as well as museums, the theatre and libraries, as typical of western heterotopias, and, evidently, those of Libya, a formally nomadic desert nation, differ.[420] In the fiction considered, they may be identified in animal communities, the geographies of subsistence that stage their struggles, the hybrid aesthetics through which they are depicted, and the deviant individuals who interact with them. In other words, these heterotopic spaces return to the spirit of Qur'ān 6:38, describing creatures as 'nations like you' (*umam amthālakum*), and reflected in creative parallelings of human and animals communities.[421]

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[418] Ouyang, *Poetics of Love*, 39.

[419] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces,' 24.

[420] Ibid., 24-25.

[421] See page 44 of my introduction where I discuss this further.

Foucault's initial conception of the heterotopia further supports this application to animal worlds. He conceived the term after reading a passage of Borges, recounting the baffling classification of animals in a Chinese Encyclopaedia. In *Les mots et les choses* (1966; *The Order of Things*), he describes his reaction as follows:

> This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.[422]

Foucault proceeds to list the animals that Borges quotes from the encyclopaedia:

> (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied (j) innumerable. (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.[423]

Central to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, elaborated in both *Les mots et les choses* and 'Des espaces autres' (1967; 'Other Spaces'), is its combining of 'impossible' and 'real' space. For Kelvin Knight, heterotopias most importantly 'open up an imaginary or mythical space detached from their real existence', and it is this 'opening up' which

[422] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), xvi.
[423] Ibid.

allows the 'real' to be 'represented, contested and inverted'.[424] Andrew Thacker similarly describes heterotopias as 'a provocative way of combining material and metaphorical senses of space'.[425]

Animals, as Foucault himself indicates, are particularly apt at combining the real with the mythic or metaphoric, conveying the physicality of the embodied creature and the flights of fantasy of fable and children's literature. This is certainly reflected in the fiction that I examine, where geographies of subsistence are traversed by demonic goats, phantom seagulls and talking jerboas, as well as silent, suffering, and dying beasts, closely matching Foucault's comments: 'It is not the "fabulous" animals that are impossible, since they are designated as such, but the narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to) the "stray dogs"'.[426] In my analyses, I consider how the 'narrowness' of this distance is radically disruptive of both the symbolic systems of novels, and the ideologies and structures of the human communities they depict, producing, in both ways, a radically creaturely ethics.

The theme of 'survival', in particular, accentuates the movement of animals between the real, metaphoric and mythic. In each text, animals' symbolic centrality corresponds to their material centrality within the communities depicted, making them both allegorical and literal battlegrounds for debates over the use of land and resources. Furthermore, encounters between humans and animals are often not of owner and property but of two beings in battles for survival, fenced in by bullpen, dangling from mountain abyss or crossing a valley of landmines. In this way, they are productive of heterotopic 'moments', accentuated through the shifting of genres and

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[424] Kelvin Knight, *Real Places and Impossible Spaces: Foucault's Heterotopia in the Fiction of James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov, and W.G. Sebald* (PhD diss., University of East Anglia, 2014), 39.

[425] Andrew Thacker, *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 26.

[426] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvii.

narrative perspectives: 'The important point is that heterotopia involves a sense of *movement* between the real and the unreal; it is thus a site defined by a process, the stress being upon the fact that it contests another site'.[427]

Commenting on al-Kūnī's desert, Walid Hamarneh has previously identified it as a 'Foucauldian heterotopia', whose austerity challenges the 'dominant urban and rural conceptions of progress and abundance associated with modernity'.[428] In broader Libyan fiction, the notion of 'abundance' also emerges as the central tension in environmental, social and political critique. I explore this through the concept of *rizq* (sustenance, blessing of God), which, for Sarra Tlili represents the equal ground of human and animal in the Qur'ān, revealing God's attention to both, and always presented as a positive boon, unlike property or affluence (*matā'* or *māl*), tempting humans to their downfall.[429] In the fiction considered, animals' morality emerges through dramas concerning *rizq*. Each novel suggests that, in leaving behind natural laws of *rizq*, and striving after affluence, humans have awoken complex, perverse and uncontrollable impulses. Relating Libya's rapidly developing consumerism to humanity's inherent dissatisfaction with *rizq*, they weigh up the possibility of harmonious community, and the location of human laws to replace natural ones.

In particular, *rizq* raises the question of hospitality to the 'other' as a fundamental form of creaturely ethics. As Andrew Shryock observes, lavish hospitality to strangers represents an important part of Bedouin life, described as 'a shared desire to locate human interaction in idealized spaces that transcend the political and moral systems

[427] Thacker, *Moving through Modernity*, 25.
[428] Walid Hamarneh, 'Welcome to the Desert of Not-Thinking,' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 41, no. 1 (2014): 87.
[429] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 148.

in which we live'.[430] Such gestures, as Shryock further comments, share much in common with Derrida's concept of 'absolute hospitality', which, like his proto-ethical encounter, implies total, unrestricted openness to the 'other':

> [...] absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner [...], but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other [...] without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names.[431]

While Shryock explores such hospitality among Bedouin in Jordan, it also resonates within Libyan literature. As 'narratives of survival', the texts under scrutiny do not demonstrate lavish generosity. They do, however, negotiate the utmost act of hospitality, which consists in allowing another to survive, even at the cost of self, and even if the 'other' is of another species, and itself a potential source of *rizq*.

In the titles of my next chapters, the word 'beast' reflects the most common translation of '*dābba*', the main Qur'ānic term for animals, which connotes rootedness in place and schemes of *rizq*, with the verb '*dabba*, *yadibbu*' meaning 'to creep, crawl (reptile, insect); to proceed, advance, or move slowly; to go on all fours'.[432] In English, 'beast' furthermore conveys both the moral fantasies of 'beast fables' and 'bestiaries', and the real struggle of 'beasts of burden'. Both connotations are central to the hybrid aesthetics that I explore, juxtaposing the marvels of talking animals, and their wise ethics, to their silence, suffering and struggle.

In Chapter Three, 'Beasts that Speak: Fables of Subsistence and the Crisis of Communities', the motif of rite-of-passage manqué is extended into explorations of

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[430] Andrew Shryock, 'Thinking about Hospitality, with Derrida, Kant, and the Balga Bedouin,' *Anthropos* 103, no. 2 (2008): 406.
[431] Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 25.
[432] Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 311.

communities in crisis, and of individuals in crisis with them. In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, I examine charged encounters between humans and animals, in which animals, in many ways, become battlegrounds for human crises. During these encounters, humans' failure to respond to the 'other' is dramatised, alongside the way in which the animal 'other' speaks back, and the morality it relays.

In Chapter Four, 'Silent Beasts: Spiritual Encounter, Creaturely Death and the Return to Beginnings', I continue my analysis of the same novels, considering how fables of subsistence move into visions of divine agency and encounter, entwined in animals' silence, and moving from crisis into apocalypse, escape, and reaffirmation of *arḍ Allāh* as the most fundamental 'other world'. Moving from broad visions of apocalypse, I then focus on individual animals' deaths and how they serve equally as powerfully to move from the discourses and divisions of human society into visions of spiritual and environmental unity. In this section, I focus on *al-Ṭāḥūna* (1985; *The Mill*) by Sālim al-Hindāwī (b. 1954), '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*' (2010; 'The Wonderful Short Life of the Dog Ramadan', trans. Robin Moger, 2011) by 'Umar al-Kiddī (b. 1959) and *al-Tābūt* (2000; *The Coffin*) by 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl (b. 1961).[433]

[433] Sālim al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbūlī, 2008); 'Umar al-Kiddī, '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*,' *Majallat Nizwā* 63 (2010): 219-223; trans. Robin Moger, 'The Wonderful Short Life of the Dog Ramadan,' *Banipal 40* (2011): 49-60; and 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl, *al-Tābūt* (Tripoli: Dār al-Firjānī, 2009).

Chapter 3 – Beasts that Speak: Fables of Subsistence and the Crisis of Communities

The beast fable is defined as the 'commonest type of fable, in which animals and birds speak and behave like human beings in a short tale usually illustrating some moral point'.[434] In this chapter, I explore how sections of beast fable interrupt predominantly realist novels, enunciating a creaturely ethics which has a profoundly unsettling effect on the framing narratives. *Min Makka ilā hunā* (1970; *From Mecca to Here*) by al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm (1937-1994), *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* (2000; *Homeless Rats*) by Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh (b. 1942) and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* (1989; *The Bleeding of the Stone*) by Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī have all been identified as modern parables or fables, primarily due to such sections, creating the expectation of an allegorical import and clear morality.[435] Straightforward messages are, however, problematised, firstly by the content of the fables themselves, serving not as 'mirrors for princes', envisioning harmonious human reigns, but opening up contestatory heterotopias, based in the subsistence of animals. Secondly, the paradigm-shifting force of these sections is intensified by their juxtaposition to the silent gaze of suffering animals, adding layers of 'proto-ethics' and 'creaturely attention'.

Traditionally, beast fable, as the most prominent form of animal allegory, has been looked upon with scepticism within animal studies. Wittily, but perhaps unjustly, Ursula Le Guin mocks such scepticism: 'if you want to clear the room of derrideans,

[434] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 34.
[435] See: Ethan Chorin, 'Homeless Rats: A Parable for Postrevolution Libya,' *Words without Borders*, January 9, 2012, accessed April 27, 2016, http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/dispatches/article/homeless-rats-a-parable-for-postrevolution-libya; Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 255; and Sharif Elmusa, 'The Ecological Bedouin: Toward Environmental Principles for the Arab Region,' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 33 (2013): 32-33.

mention Beatrix Potter without sneering'.[436] Increasingly, and contrary to Le Guin's assessment, fable has provoked interest. For Harel, as discussed in my introduction, fables combining human and animal perspectives are particularly productive of multiple meanings.[437] Oerlemans, meanwhile, argues that fables best demonstrate the conflicted way in which humans regard their relationship with animals, suggesting that humans are 'the heart of the matter', but also revealing fundamental 'glimmers of likeness' between them and animals.[438] As he further comments, the traditional beast fable likely also emerged from a belief that 'the carefully observed behaviour of animals contains its own natural wisdom of survival, adaptation, and even community, codifying human *and* animal wisdom'.[439]

Steve Baker, meanwhile, has gone furthest in suggesting the 'disruptive animality' inherent to talking animals. The genre's literary conventions are, he argues, supposed to serve as 'built-in safeguards to hold the adult safely aloof from all that which is other'.[440] For Baker, however, certain 'tensions' and 'awkwardnesses' arise from the fact that animals can never be totally read out of texts, and particularly those in which 'real' animals are contrasted to 'speaking' ones: 'it is the very instability of the anthropomorphized animal's identity which can make contact or even proximity with it so hazardous for those with an overblown sense of their own importance, power and identity'.[441]

Narrative 'awkwardnesses' in the novels that I examine arise from the fact that some animals speak and some do not, some humans are receptive to them and others are not. At the same time, situations of survival, in which all struggle for *rizq*, compound

[436] Ursula Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1987), 10.
[437] Harel, 'The Animal Voice,' 13.
[438] Oerlemans, 'The Animal in Allegory,' 5.
[439] Ibid., 6.
[440] Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 124
[441] Ibid., 159.

'glimmers of likeness', suggesting that, whether human, anthropomorphised animal or 'real' beast, all are simply creatures, struggling for survival. Finally, the very fact of animals having speech, and the content of what they say, convey messages of environmental, psychological and spiritual import, in which animals' importance within cosmic schemes is emphasised. This last characteristic, in particular, has strong affinities with the fable in wider Arabic tradition.

A first forerunner may be located in the Qur'ān, in which both an ant and a hoopoe speak, with the former protecting her people from King Solomon's approaching army, and the latter bringing him news of Queen Balqīs.[442] As Sarra Tlili suggests, these verses reveal animals as 'moral beings capable of making choices and held accountable for those choices'.[443] They also, she observes, provide an external view of the human species, revealing that 'in the same way that humans hold opinions about other animals, other animals also have their own views of humans'.[444]

A perhaps more obvious forerunner may be found in the Ikhwān al-Ṣāfa's 'Complaint of the Animals against Man' (c. 961), in which, as Irwin observes, animals argue for their own survival, and fable is supplemented by 'realistic zoological details'.[445] As Lenn Goodman puts it, 'the personification of the animals by the Ikhwān points not to projected human motives but to the natural, God-given needs and strengths, zest, and élan of all animals, striving after life'.[446] Most significantly, animals in the fable also put humanity on trial for its 'overreaching, oppression, and injustice' and 'heedless, impious thanklessness'.[447] So, too, in the Libyan novels I examine, humans are critiqued

[442] Qur'ān 27:18-26.
[443] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 165.
[444] Ibid., 206.
[445] Irwin, 'Arabic Beast Fable,' 50.
[446] Goodman, introduction to *The Case of the Animals*, 40.
[447] Goodman and McGregor, trans., *The Case of the Animals versus Man*, 65.

for their voracious behaviour when the problems of survival give way to those of greed.

In what follows, I trace the creaturely ethics of each novel through notions of 'self-preservation' in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 'struggle' in *Min Makka ilā hunā* and 'self-sacrifice' in *Nazīf al-ḥajar*. To do so, I first introduce the 'survival plots' of each, and how, within them, humans fail to attend to animals as fellow creatures. Fables, in fact, are considered only in my third and final section, reflecting how their significance within the wider narratives, and disruptiveness of them, are interwoven with the realism and symbolic systems within which they are located.

Worlds of Struggle: Human Dilemmas and Animal Victims

Set respectively in the coastal town of Sūsa, the valley of Jandūba and Massak Satfat in the Sahara, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* take place at around the time that each of their authors was born, and in places close to where they grew up, providing a panoramic vision of Libya, from the North-East and West to the deep South. Despite their geographic diversity, however, all convey a retrospective perspective, tinged with nostalgia, into which nonhuman heterotopias are introduced. This shared perspective is closely linked to each writer's long years outside Libya. As Kelvin Knight observes, experiences of exile often lead to heterotopic writing, providing detachment from 'the familiar patterns of thought constituted by our native lands and languages'.[448] Returning to the scenes of their youth, al-Nayhūm, al-Faqīh and al-Kūnī inscribe all with the otherness of the animal, challenging not just Libyan 'patterns of thought', but human assumptions as a whole.

In all three, notions of 'battle' (*ma'raka*) and 'struggle' (*ṣirā'*) are central, concerning both human injustice and basic survival, as Elmarsafy observes of al-Kūnī:

[448] Knight, 'Real Places,' 50.

> In his oeuvre, we are treated to tale upon tale of violent invasion and settlement but the actors are not (or very rarely) Western colonial powers versus indigenous Africans. Instead we have beings that are usually considered heterogeneous – human and nonhuman animals, deities and spirits, 'inorganic' beings such as earth, heaven and the law locked in a struggle for space and sovereignty.[449]

Beginning with battles between human and animal communities, I first introduce *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, before moving to *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, whose portrayals of individuals, struggling to survive outside community in nonhuman worlds, provide striking parallels to one another. In all, 'struggle for space and sovereignty' is expressed through animal voices.

The Jerboas of Jandūba

Born in 1942, in Mizda, North-West Libya, al-Faqīh has, from his first short story collection in 1965, published prolifically, producing novels, plays, and even a twelve-volume epic. Moving from Mizda to Tripoli at the age of fifteen, and then to Cairo to study journalism, he eventually moved to London in the late 1960s, where he studied drama and theatre. In the ensuing years, he carried out various diplomatic functions and, in 1983, was awarded a PhD on the Libyan short story from the University of Edinburgh. He currently lives between Cairo and Tripoli.

Movement between rural Libyan villages and northern European cities is a major theme in his writing. As Ahmida remarks, 'Al-Faqīh's work reflects themes of tension and conflict between rural village traditional, patriarchal life and individualistic, urban values'.[450] At the same time, much of his work also remains rooted solely in the mores

[449] Elmarsafy, 'Ibrahim al-Koni's Hybrid Aesthetic,' 190.
[450] Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*, 57.

of nomadic communities and their struggle for survival, as exemplified in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, which represents the culmination of the increasingly central, and increasingly entangled themes of political and environmental injustice in his work, moving from his earlier stories in which, as author Kāmil al-Maqhūr comments, simple celebration of Libya's poor, rural communities is central.[451] Among these stories, '*al-Jarād*' ('The Locusts'), for example, depicts a village battling an oncoming swarm of locusts. As al-Faqīh comments, the story tended to be read in political terms, although his impetus for writing it was quite different:

> Take *The Locusts* (Al Jarad). This was one of the first stories I wrote, back in the 1960s. It was inspired by a real event that took place in my hometown of Mizda when I was a boy. The story was interpreted by a highly politicized Arab community as a literary innovation, the first Arab use of 'The People' as literary protagonists – and a commentary on foreign occupation that had ended in Libya several years before. In fact, when I wrote *The Locusts*, I was not thinking in any such terms, at least not consciously.[452]

Based on the real effects of animals on human life in rural Libya, the locusts themselves are not dwelt on in a sustained manner in the story, nor does a political agenda become particularly visible within it. Initially, animals therefore seem to have migrated into al-Faqīh's fiction simply because of their impactful presence in the lives of the communities he depicted. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, a more explicitly environmental consciousness appears in his play *al-Ghazālāt* (1984; *The Gazelles*) and

[451] Kāmil al-Maqhūr, '*Ḥawl al-qiṣṣa al-lībiyya*,' 135.

[452] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, foreword to *Translating Libya*, ed. Ethan Chorin (London: Darf Publishers, 2015), viii.

novel *Ḥuqūl al-ramād* (1985; *Fields of Ash*), both exploring the ambivalent effects of oil on rural societies.[453]

The coincidence of this consciousness with Gaddafi's increasing tyranny is certainly also intriguing. On the one hand, critique of environmental injustice may be interpreted as a strategy to conceal political critique. It is, however, often so entangled with the political that both seem to serve as circling allegories for one another. In the introduction to his short story collection *Khams khanāfis tuḥakim al-shajara* (1997; *Five Beetles Try the Tree*), for example, al-Faqīh explicitly indicates its political content, concerned with 'the practices and behaviours of rulers'.[454] In the titular story, meanwhile, he depicts a rural community baffled as to why, for the first time, their olive tree, the sole source of their income, is not bearing fruit.[455] At first, they believe they have been cursed for allowing modern technology to encroach on their traditional ways. The village seer, however, informs them that the land's beetles and flies are punishing the tree for destroying their fragile ecosystem after it was planted there by humans. In this way, al-Faqīh depicts invasion on a primordial level, concerning the smallest of creatures, and allowing the disruption of harmonious systems to be interpreted on levels environmental, political and social.

Fi'rān bilā juḥūr is similarly multi-faceted. Subtitled 'A Page from the *Book of Hunger*', it is set in the late 1940s, in a time of drought, and relates a battle for sustenance in the desert valley of Jandūba, North-West Libya, where the tribe of Sheikh Abū Layla arrives, having suffered long periods of starvation. Expecting to reach a plentiful harvest, the tribe discovers only empty spikes, as the barley has been collected and

[453] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Al-Ghazālāt: masraḥiya* (Tripoli: Al-Mansha'a al-'Āmma li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1984); *Ḥuqūl al-ramād* (Tripoli: al-Mansha'a al-'Ammā li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1985).
[454] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Khams khanāfis tuḥākim al-shajara* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1997), 9.
[455] Al-Faqīh, '*Khams khanāfis tuḥākim al-shajara*,' in *Khams khanāfis tuḥākim al-shajara*, 11-18 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1997).

hoarded by the land's original inhabitants, a colony of jerboas, desert rodents, with long back legs and large ears and eyes. While the barley's owners receive lavish compensation from the nearby British military base, the tribe, as seasonal workers, are left empty-handed. As they review their options, they offer a panorama of subsistence livelihoods in the nascent, pre-oil state: working on the coast as servants or labourers; collecting scrap metal from World War Two; picking alfalfa; hunting; felling tamarisk trees for charcoal; eating grass; picking grain from camel dung; or wayside robbery. If all else fails, the tribe recalls how its ancestors would block the windows of their houses with mud in times of deprivation, transforming them into tombs and starving to death together. As they consider their options, the importance of maintaining dignity in deprivation is, above all, emphasised.

By chance, however, Sheikh Abū Layla's grandson, 'Alī, digs up a jerboa hole, discovering the barley inside. Celebrating what they interpret as a divine miracle, the tribe begins digging up the entire valley, while the jerboas organise their resistance. Matters are then further complicated as the tribe of Āl Jibrīl arrives from the East, eating the jerboas, whose meat is forbidden in the customs of Sheikh Abū Layla's tribe, and astounding the latter with their liberal ways. The novel concludes as a divinely sent flood sweeps through the valley, obliterating the barley and scattering humans and animals alike.

In contrast to this unified ending, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* is, throughout, split between a realist 'human' strand and a 'nonhuman' fable strand. Following the discovery of the grain, the 'human' drama moves from one of life-and-death to one of culture and romance, concerning the interactions of Āl Jibrīl and the tribe of Sheikh Abū Layla. In the fable strand, however, the fight for survival continues, with twelve of the novel's thirty-five chapters depicting the valley's animal inhabitants. In the last of these, the jerboas send delegates to consult Jandūba's resident 'wise ascetics', a tortoise and hedgehog who

live on a mountain overlooking the valley, and who, in offering the jerboas advice, articulate an ethics of survival, based on the principle of existence as 'self-preservation' (*ḥifẓ al-dhāt*), which humans alone pervert into revenge, annihilation and excess.[456]

Through each strand, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* emerges simultaneously as a nostalgic swansong to nomadic life, and an indictment of humanity, with both elements remaining in tension until the novel's conclusion. As al-Faqīh states, he began writing the novel in the 1960s, before postponing it after the 1967 war.[457] Distracted by 'more pressing political events', it took him thirty-three years to complete, and his return to it was primarily due to a sense of guilt towards his family, whose struggles in the desert had been his inspiration: 'I had attempted to record a part of their struggles (*kifāḥihim*) against the harshness of the environment, injustice of nature, unpredictable ways of the desert climate and difficulty of historical circumstance'.[458] The novel, according to al-Faqīh, aims to communicate a disappearing 'human experience (*al-tajriba al-insāniyya*) of great depth and fertility, with all the pain and suffering that accompanied it'.[459] The question remains, however, as to why jerboas and other desert animals are so central to this 'human' record.

Rita Sakr suggests that the battle of humans and jerboas symbolizes the silenced conflict between Gaddafi and the disaffected Libyan people.[460] This reading is, however, problematised by the fact that the first instalments were published in the newspaper *al-Ruwwād* (*The Pioneers*), before Gaddafi's 1969 coup. Further, since the fictional tribe is inspired by his own family, it seems unlikely that al-Faqīh would use it to embody a

[456] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 123.
[457] Ibid., 6.
[458] Ibid.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Rita Sakr, *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary Literatures and Political Geographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 52.

dictator. The humans are certainly never depicted as unambiguously tyrannical. They, like the animals, are victims of circumstance and, while protest against Gaddafi is undoubtedly latent in some parts of the novel, the initial seeds were planted by alternative reflection. In fluctuating constantly between human and animal perspectives, the novel intersperses nostalgic imaginings of lost ways with species-wide critique concerning invasion, possession and response to the 'other'.

Even as the tribe of Sheikh Abū Layla arrives in Jandūba, the narrative perspective shifts from above to below, establishing them as one species among many. The 'merciless sun' is described glaring down on all, while, underfoot, an ant colony is destroyed by human footsteps. The 'forty human beings' that constitute the tribe are also listed last: 'It was large and long, the shadow of a caravan entering Jandouba: five camels, three donkeys, four dogs, one horse and forty human beings (*arba'ūna kā'inan bashariyyan*), made up of men, women and children'.[461] This list mirrors the novel as a whole, where humans are introduced only after jerboas, and, even then, referred to as one species among many. At the same time, as they set up camp, they are depicted as a close and joyful community, joking, singing and shouting. Similarly, celebrations of their folklore, dancing and story-telling are juxtaposed to Jandūba as a heterotopia of survival struggles, in which their actions are entangled with the silent suffering of animals, and their indignant voices in fable.

Sūsa's Sea Life

While *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* depicts a community in conflict with animals, *Min Makka ilā hunā* portrays an individual whose conflict with society is transferred onto the animal world. As in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, this conflict, taking place in the 1930s, in the coastal town of Sūsa, is over sources of *rizq*, while its negotiation of power is constellated around the

[461] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 7; *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 9.

central figure of a sea turtle. Like all al-Nayhūm's early writing, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, begun in 1968, and first serialised in *al-Ḥaqīqa*, concerns, through this turtle, how Libyans should deal with processes of modernity, combining, as Aḥmad al-Shaylābī remarks, elements of all his social and cultural critique from the 1960s to the 1990s.[462] The novel is also, however, more symbolically complex, with al-Nayhūm himself observing that its meanings should multiply with every reading of it.[463] Above all, this complexity arises from the hybrid presence of animals within it, with a symbolic turtle juxtaposed to a phantom seagull and a 'real' rat. As Aḥmad 'Atiyya remarks, the Libya coastline and its wildlife emerge as the novel's 'second hero'.[464]

Meanwhile, the main protagonist, Mas'ūd, is forced to leave Benghazi after Italian corporations flood the market. Moving to Sūsa, he struggles to compete with the local fishermen, possessing only oars and no motor for his boat. Barely surviving, he is offered three francs for every sea turtle he brings to a new Italian restaurant, offering them as a delicacy for the menu. Local belief, however, holds that the turtles are enchanted jinn, a superstition manipulated by the local *fgi* to maintain his power over the villagers in the face of the Italian colonisers. As different characters struggle over it, the turtle comes to symbolise a battle for Libya itself, torn between the *fgi*, the Italian colonisers and Mas'ūd's simple desire to provide for himself and his wife. An impoverished, aging fisherman of sub-Saharan origin, he is marginalised both because of his skin colour and his rebellious attitude to the *fgi*, who employs rumour, superstition and ultimately violence against him.

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[462] Aḥmad al-Shaylābī, *Al-Qaḍāyā al-ijtimā'iyya fī-l-riwāya al-lībiyya* (Misrata: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Sha'b, 2003), 154.

[463] Al-Kubtī, ed., *Nawāris al-shawq*, 204.

[464] Aḥmad Muḥammad 'Aṭiyya, *Fī-l-adab al-lībī al-ḥadīth* (Beirut: Dār al-Taḍāmun li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1973), 90.

Most of *Min Makka ilā hunā* represents a bitter stream-of-consciousness from Mas'ūd's perspective. Constantly referred to as *al-Zanjī* (the Negro) or *al-'abd* (the slave), both by characters within the novel and by the narrative voice itself, his alienation from society and self is central. Repeating the *fgi's* insults, he calls himself a 'slave', 'coward' and 'drunkard', and envisions the world as a battleground, endlessly employing the words 'enemy' (*'adūw*), 'defeat' (*hazīma*), 'side' (*ṭaraf*) and 'battle' (*ma'raka*). While some have suggested that, in contrast to the *fgi*, he represents enlightenment and progress, he is, in fact, something of an anti-hero, constantly manipulating and lying.[465] Ultimately, however, Mas'ūd's loneliness and belligerence spill into the heterotopic Sūsa coastline, where he elaborates an ethics of simple, creaturely struggle, based in notions of 'fishermen' and 'slaves', and through which he both critiques and dramatises humanity's fallacies and flaws.

The majority of what the coastal animals say is a product of Mas'ūd's hallucinations, most prominently embodied in a phantom seagull. In addition, however, a brief section of fable 'proper' is rooted in the struggle of a 'real' water rat. Through each strand, a further layer of complexity is added to the novel's generic hybridity, which al-Faqīh, among others, has commented upon:

> In spite of its realistic setting, filled with battles to gain daily bread (*ṣirā'āt li-intizā' luqmat al-'aysh*), and where land and sea, black and white are all too concrete, a haze of mythology colours the scenes of the novel, lifting it from the world of time, place and realistic characters into symbols and existential signs (*dalālāt ramziyya wa-wujūdiyya*), mixed with a good dose of playfulness (*rūḥ al-du'āba*) and an astounding capacity to detect and depict the ironic hypocrisies of life. This novel may thus be considered one of the pioneering attempts to

[465] Al-Shaylābī, *al-Qaḍāyā al-ijtimā'iyya*, 135.

> establish this literary genre and implant it in the soil of Arabic literature in Libya.[466]

The 'literary genre' that al-Faqīh refers to is that of the fantastic, mythological and mystical that infused the Arabic novel in the 1960s, and that, in the Libyan novel, is particularly concentrated on animals. In *Min Makka ilā hunā*, it is also used to express existential and spiritual dimensions, moving beyond the satire that characterises al-Nayhūm's shorter work. In this respect, Mas'ūd's dark, claustrophobic consciousness embodies al-Nayhūm's own sense of spiritual and geographical dislocation, but also, as he insists, the alienation of humanity as a whole:

> It is not Mas'ūd who is isolated (*al-ma'zūl*) but you and me. Each one of us is isolated by his convictions (*mu'taqadātihi*), standing as a wall of solitude around him. The true purpose of education (*al-tarbiya*), morality (*al-khulq*), belief (*al-'aqīda*) and love (*al-ḥubb*) should be to overcome this isolation.[467]

Through tracing the seagull, rat and turtle of the Sūsa coast, I explore how the 'love' and 'belief' needed to eradicate humanity's 'wall of convictions' are, in al-Nayhūm's work, primarily dramatised through the relationship of human to animal. Based in simple gestures of creaturely hospitality, it draws him surprisingly close to the fiction of his younger friend, al-Kūnī.

Waddān in the Wadis

Published in 1989, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* marked al-Kūnī's rise to fame as a new voice in modern Arabic literature. Unlike the mythic setting of *Wāw al-ṣughrā*, it takes place in the 1950s, in the wadis of Massak Satfat, against a backdrop of European archaeological expeditions, tourist excursions and American military operations. Paralleling the

[466] Al-Faqīh, '*Ṣāḥib al-nufūdh*,' 47.
[467] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 24-5.

survival theme and hybrid aesthetics of al-Faqīh and al-Nayhūm's novels, it extends them further into the wild and the mystical. The novel's protagonist, Asūf, is a lone goatherd, tasked with protecting ancient rock frescoes from thieves. His solitary existence is, however, brutally interrupted as Qābīl Ibn Ādam (Cain son of Adam) arrives from a northern city.[468] Having already hunted the desert's gazelles to near-extinction, Cain charges Asūf with leading him to the elusive *waddān*, rare mountain goats with powerful torsos and curling horns. Asūf, who enjoys a special bond with the animal, must divert Cain who is driven insane by longing for the animal's meat. Eventually, he begins hallucinating that Asūf has become the animal, and kills him in its place in a gruesome scene of crucifixion and slaughter.

Interspersed with the novel's main drama, meanwhile, are scenes of flashback to the 1930s and the Italian colonial presence, narrating Asūf's mythic relationship with the *waddān* and Cain's with the gazelle. Both are based on animals having, at some point, rescued humans' lives, and, in ensuing encounters, both *waddān* and gazelles, in various ways, call Asūf and Cain to respond to their indebtedness, as well as the animals' alterity as living beings within the struggle for survival. Within this perspective, the novel's section of fable, narrated by a gazelle, sums up the 'creaturely ethics' of self-sacrifice and hospitality within the broader novel, starkly contrasted to the 'laxity' (*istirkhā'*), 'addiction' (*idmān*) and 'satiation' (*shab'*) of modern civilisation. All three concepts, alongside the 'unseen' (*al-khafā'*) and the 'secret' (*al-sirr*), form a central part of the 'technical terms' of al-Kūnī's desert philosophy.[469]

Structured around fateful clashes between creatures, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* articulates an ethics of encounter which, in many ways, emphasises the fundamental nature of 'signs' and

[468] I refer to Qābīl as Cain throughout to convey in English the connotations of the scriptural character, further discussed in Chapter Six.

[469] For other terms, see page 122.

'secrets' as a call to respond to the 'other', and recognise its fundamental unity with the self, briefly dramatised through the companionship of leader and crane in *Wāw al-ṣughrā*. Society and wealth render the individual irresponsive to such signs, and a state of spiritual and physical 'alertness' (*yaqẓa*) must therefore be fostered, mirroring that of animals and based in hunger, thirst and isolation. The characters of al-Kūnī's work are therefore in a constant 'battle with death', as observed by al-Ghānamī, while reference to '*nazīf*' (bleeding) in the title of *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, echoing across al-Kūnī's fiction, indicates the vital connection it draws between spiritual awareness and physical vulnerability: 'In al-Koni's fiction, the meaning of life is always tied to struggle. Thus, al-Koni's novels paradoxically suggest that only here – in the harshest corners of the desert waste – does life emerge in its richest sense'.[470]

Nazīf al-ḥajar's striking environmental message has already received considerable attention. Gail Ramsay, for example, examines how Cain represents all the destructiveness of modern technology, a 'cosmopolitan big-city dweller', wreaking havoc on traditional human and animal lifestyles.[471] Jehan Fouad and Saeed Alwakeel, meanwhile, assert the 'centrality of the fable of the original sin to the narrative', represented in 'the betrayal of the sacred bond with nature'.[472] Finally, Sharif Elmusa describes Asūf as an 'ecological Bedouin', as well as the '"conscience of nature"', nagging us to tread gently', while Cain represents the worst effects of modernity, in which 'need and desire' become indistinguishable.[473] My own approach focuses

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[470] Al-Ghānamī, *Malḥamat*, 14; Elliott Colla, 'Al-Koni's Homes,' *Ahramonline*, December 22, 2010, accessed May 10, 2016, http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/18/2340/Books/AlKoni%E2%80%99s-homes.aspx.

[471] Gail Ramsay, 'Breaking the Silence of Nature in an Arabic Novel: *Nazīf al-ḥajar* by Ibrāhīm al-Kawnī,' in *From Tur Abdin to Hadramawt: Festschrift in Honour of Bo Isaksson on the occasion of his retirement*, ed. Tal Davidovich, Ablahad Lahdo and Torkel Lindquist (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2014), 168-9.

[472] Jehan Farouk Fouad and Saeed Alwakeel, 'Representations of the Desert in Silko's *Ceremony* and Al-Koni's *The Bleeding*,' *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 33 (2013): 56.

[473] Elmusa, 'The Ecological Bedouin,' 28, 33.

particularly on issues of 'need' and 'desire', or '*rizq*' and what surpasses it, examining how animals both fall victim to human 'desire' and condemn it. I examine this first in terms of Cain's failure to respond to the gazelle, before contrasting it, in Chapter Four, to Asūf's creaturely and spiritual openness to the *waddān*.

Creatures Eaten: Human Discourses and the Call to Respond

Whether battling for grain or falling foul of human violence and superstitions, animals in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* consistently move from the structures and discourses of human society into simple, creaturely presences, revealing their fallacies. Before examining their presence in fable, this movement is my concern, centred on questions of human response. In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, I look at the tribes' joking attitude to the jerboas, and how it juxtaposes their mass slaughter. In *Min Makka ilā hunā*, I consider the *fgi's* use of the turtle as a discursive weapon against Mas'ūd, and Mas'ūd's eventual reconciliation with it. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, I explore the addiction of Cain and his American friend, John Parker, to gazelle meat, irrespective of the ways in which they are called to respond. In all three novels, I examine how the animal's 'consumption', whether literal or through appropriation of its being and essence, is profoundly challenged.

Jerboa Jokes

After Sheikh Abū Layla's tribe recovers from its initial relief at discovering the barley, the adventure begins to be transcribed into song, joke and story, revealing the crucial tension in the novel between nostalgia for nomadic ways and critique of human negligence. Al-'Ammā Maryūma, the tribe's oldest resident and bastion of its songs and dance, composes a rhyme, beginning: 'Greetings to you, long-legged ones, For we and

you are neighbours now'.[474] The young men, meanwhile, establish a running joke in which they refer to the barley as the 'jerboas' barley'.[475] Finally, the story of Um Basīsī and the mouse (*fi'r*), told by the Sheikh's wife, al-Ḥājja Khadīja, to her grandson, 'Alī, represents the novel's principal intertextual reference to the jerboas, who, as the novel's title demonstrates, are often also referred to as mice (*fi'rān*).

A well-known Libyan folktale, cited by many modern authors, the tale's central concern is food and hospitality, depicting the flow of water and life among creatures and nature. As told by al-Ḥājja Khadīja, the story goes as follows: a little mouse steals the milk of Um Basīsī, the sparrow, and she pecks off his tale.[476] The mouse begs her to return it as he needs it to dance at Eid, but she refuses to unless he brings her milk from the goat. Going to the goat, the mouse is instructed to fetch fruit from the lotus tree, which wants water from the valley, which, in turn, wants the women to ululate, so that their voice will provoke the rain god to bring water. The women, however, want bread, while the baker wants grain from the field. At this point, the mouse decides to seize the whole field for himself:

> The mouse, who had gone to the field to beg for barley for the baker, realised begging wouldn't solve his problems, and so he decided to use his teeth and claws and take all the barley in the field for himself. That way he'd never ever be forced to beg for help from any tree, stone, bird, human or other desert creature, and would be master of his own fate.[477]

In al-Ḥājja Khadīja's rendition, the story's traditional ending is changed from one of harmonious hospitality, in which '*ahl al-bayt*' (the people of the house) take pity on the

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[474] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 73.

[475] Ibid., 203.

[476] '*Um Basīsī*' means 'sparrow' in Libyan dialect.

[477] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 43.

mouse, giving him what he needs to satisfy the other creatures, and dance at Eid.[478] In contrast, al-Ḥājja Khadīja's story becomes one of violent appropriation. A spiritual woman, and a loving grandmother, this transformation is intriguing. 'Alī is said to have wanted to hear the story because of his fascination with the jerboas. However, like the songs and jokes circulating among the tribe, al-Ḥājja's story simply makes light of their theft. As Sakr suggests, the tribe's act of appropriation, and the discourses which they use to disguise it, may well represent a tacit critique of Gaddafi. At the same time, the story, like the songs and jokes, is also celebrated as a traditional part of folklore. The musical skills of al-'Ammā Maryūma unite the women in dance, the 'jerboas' barley' represents the men's jovial camaraderie, and al-Ḥājja Khadīja's story lulls her grandson to sleep.

Depictions of the formerly starved tribes feasting on meat are similarly double-edged, particularly as this meat provides one of the principal means through which they finally overcome their cultural differences and celebrate their shared humanity. When Āl Jibrīl first arrives, Sheikh Abū Layla's tribe treats them with distrust, refraining from traditional gestures of Bedouin hospitality so as not to betray the secret of the barley. Āl Jibrīl's liberal ways, exemplified by their willingness to eat the jerboas, further represent a crucial point of contention. Romance, however, breaks down barriers of selfishness and fear. In one of the novel's love stories, Zahra of Āl Jibrīl convinces al-Rūmānī of Sheikh Abū Layla's tribe to taste the meat and it becomes part of a celebration of human togetherness:

> The family had asked him to stay and sit with them around the fire. They'd roasted some jerboa meat, too, having first dipped it in a mixture of salt and spices [...] He'd been tempted, by the smell of the roast meat dripping with fat

[478] See: Aḥmad Yūsuf 'Aqīla, '*Umm Basīsī*,' in *Kharārīf lībiyya*, 107-115 (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2008).

> and the way the people were devouring it, to join them in their feast [...] When he'd declared he was ready to eat the roast jerboa meat, she'd been filled with delight and offered it to him with her own hand. Then, when their hands touched, they'd stuck together because of the fatty meat, and he'd been filled with a passionate desire to hold her in his arms.[479]

The jerboa meat literally brings the tribes together and their union is depicted in unambiguously positive terms, as, despite resistance from various reactionary figures, they begin to share customs and cooperate in collecting and threshing the barley. Cultural differences, the novel suggests, should be overcome to enrich and strengthen humanity. The grim circumstances of the starving tribes, meanwhile, render it difficult to condemn their joy in discovering the barley or even eating the jerboas.

At the same time, however, evocations of the jerboas scurrying in panic around the campsite continue to disrupt the narrative and its human characters: 'The sight of these creatures leaping about in front of them worried Haj Abu Hamama. The number of homeless jerboas (*al-fi'rān al-musharrada*) was growing daily, and they were looking for homes inside the tents'.[480] Drawing the reader's attention back to the sections of fable, which intersperse the human drama, the novel provides an uncomfortable alternative to the roasted flesh that causes such delight. In so doing, it emphasises all that is forgotten in both the fight for survival and flourishing of culture. Failure to respond to the absolute 'other', meanwhile, becomes symptomatic of humans' tendency to suspicion and segregation.

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[479] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 143.

[480] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 77; *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 95.

Turtle Weapons

In *Min Makka ilā hunā*, the turtle is put to more pernicious use in human power structures. Weaving legends around it, the *fgi* creates a discursive weapon against Mas'ūd, scaring the other villagers into compliance by repeating that it is a '*murābīṭ*' (Sufi saint), '*malikat al-baḥr*' (sea queen) and '*jinniyyat al-baḥr*' (sea jinni). A young boy who died at sea is said to have been carried off by turtles. Storms are said to be sent against Mas'ūd as punishment from *Allāh* for hunting them, and so, too, is his lack of offspring. Finally, as a male turtle enters the bay, the *fgi* claims that it has come for Mas'ūd, confirming his transgressions. The turtle is thus enmeshed in superstitious power to the extent that Mas'ūd's exclusion from Sūsa is dictated by its movements, as he observes to his wife:

> The *fgi* wants to expel me from Sūsa so that the sea turtles remain his commodity alone (*biḍā'atahu waḥdahu*). That is what he wants, I tell you. The turtles are part of his invisible tavern where he sells riddles and saints and the wrath of *Allāh*. And when someone eats his turtles at the restaurant, they're eating a piece of his divinity. Do you understand what I'm telling you?[481]

Mas'ūd's rage is ultimately levelled at the turtle, which becomes a symbolic battleground for his rebellion against the *fgi's* 'invisible commodities'. However, while bitterly rejecting the *fgi's* claims, he cannot fully dispel his fears. Alone at sea, his hunting expeditions become battles to establish sane connections with the world, and to relate to the turtle beyond both fear and hatred. Having caught a turtle, a storm rises and he remains in his boat overnight with the animal's gaze on him:

> Al-Zanjī sat on the edge of the boat in stony silence, watching the turtle's ugly eyes fixed sternly and unblinkingly upon him [...] She was hungry and her eyes

[481] Al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, 131.

> were pleading with him for a crust of bread (*kisrat al-khubz*). He gazed at her, frozen with fear, before standing up so suddenly he almost toppled into the water. He began to curse her at the top of his voice. And then he did something terrible and childish that would haunt him for the rest of his days: he lifted his robe and urinated on her head in a miserable attempt to allay his fears by turning the whole thing into a joke.[482]

Despite perceiving the turtle's suffering, Mas'ūd's fear drives him to kill her. After, while attempting to keep insulting her, he remembers only her 'dignified eyes' (*'aynayhā al-waqūratayn*) and how she died 'with head held high' (*marfū'a al-ra's*) while he behaved like a 'foolish child' (*ṭifl akhraq*).[483] The turtle's innocent gaze testifies to his senseless destruction and, through a series of such encounters, signifies the barriers of fear and hatred that humans build, sending them back to their fallacious discourses.

Mas'ūd, meanwhile, continues to be haunted by the animals' simple physical suffering as he leaves her tied up on the beach. Eventually, he even begins identifying his own suffering with hers, dreaming of being prepared for slaughter together in the market:

> He saw himself lying face forwards on the marble worktop where the turtles were going to be butchered. Then he saw his turtle next to him, burying her head into her shell. He knew that they had finally reached the end of their journey, side by side, and that neither of them had anything to complain about anymore. So he lifted his head and, within full sight of the market boy, he winked at her. Then a wave of regret seized him and he pressed his face against

[482] Ibid., 53.
[483] Ibid., 55.

> the marble top, surrendering to the stabs of the knife that were oh so familiar.[484]

After awaking from the dream, Mas'ūd regrets losing his momentary companionship: 'Overcome by a sudden loneliness (*waḥda*), he recklessly longed to push his wife aside and lie back down by the turtle on the marble worktop'.[485] Unlike the tribes in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, Mas'ūd begins to respond to the animal other, propelled by his own alienation and persecution. This retreat emerges most fully in fable, where creaturely struggle becomes a counter-discourse to the superstitious beliefs, power struggles and greed dramatised in the broader narrative.

Gazelle Feasts and Beliefs

While Mas'ūd seeks respite in the turtle beyond society's 'wall of convictions', *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, through Cain, provides the ultimate example of human failure to respond, blinded by the discourses, drives and desires of civilisation. Images of consumption dominate the novel, portrayed, above all, through Cain, who, as Elmarsafy observes, exemplifies Derrida's '*carno-phallogocentric*' male, sacrificing the flesh and identity of other subjectivities to confirm his own.[486] Both he and his American ally John Parker are possessed by a voracious need to consume flesh, and their destruction of the desert gazelles is told from chapters seventeen to twenty-three, explaining the origins of both their addictions, juxtaposed to the gazelle's voice in fable, and desperate, creaturely gaze.

Cain, in particular, is helpless to curb his addictions, which combine the momentousness of myth with the rhetoric of male virility, and brutality of simple

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[484] Ibid., 82.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Elmarsafy, *Sufism*, 128.

desire. As a baby, when his family were lost and dying of thirst in the desert, a gazelle sacrificed her life for his, and he was given her blood to drink, creating a bond of kinship between him and the species, but also a lifelong addiction to meat. In many ways, the story both echoes and inverts Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* (c. 1169), in which the baby Ḥayy is adopted by a gazelle and weaned on her milk. When she dies, Ḥayy, as discussed in my introduction, fathoms the secrets of existence from her corpse.[487] Cain, on the other hand, weaned on blood, is driven not to contemplate but to consume. So severe does his addiction become that a soothsayer even predicts his appetite will be assuaged only when he consumes the flesh of another human. This predication is realised through combined images of carnivorousness and cannibalism, in which Cain kills both a gazelle, who is then described as his sister, and Asūf, who transforms into a *waddān*. While connected to myth, meanwhile, his drives also arise from dominant, virile values. He thus jokingly compares carnivorousness to sleeping with women, and declares to Asūf, 'If you don't eat meat, then you have to live apart from other people. I see now why you've chosen to live in this empty wilderness'.[488]

John Parker's addiction, meanwhile, is more cerebral in nature, yet no less pernicious. He is first introduced in Chapter Twenty-Two entitled '*al-Afyūn*' ('The Opium'). Stationed at the Wheelus Air Base, the captain studied various mystical traditions at university in California, and, after being posted to Libya, becomes fascinated with popular Sufism. In particular, he is obsessed with the possibility of gaining mystical experience through animals and, in his readings, encounters two ways of doing so. The first dictates an existence lived apart from people: 'silencing his tongue until he lost

[487] See page 14 of my introduction for discussion of this.

[488] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 128.

the ability of speech, eating grass until he forgot the taste of food'.[489] The alternative is simply to eat an animal and, in particular, a gazelle:

> In gazelles God has placed the secret (*al-sirr*) and sown the meaning. For him who tastes the flesh of this creature, all impotence in the soul will be swept away, the veil of separation will be rent, and he will see God as He truly is.[490]

John opts for roasted meat, becoming addicted, but no closer to spiritual enlightenment. Instead, as he supplies Cain with weapons and vehicles, he assists in the eradication of the species.

In Chapter Twenty-Three, '*Laḥm dhawī al-qurbā*' (Flesh of the Kindred), he and Cain embark in a helicopter to the Hasawna Mountains to shoot the last of the desert gazelles. The hunt that follows strikingly contrasts the typical paradigm of human-animal pursuit in al-Kūnī's work, which almost always leads to both physical suffering and spiritual revelation. On the contrary, Cain and John Parker's pursuit takes place from behind the window of a helicopter, far above geographies of subsistence, and where they remain in control. As Van Leeuwen comments, technology allows Cain to overthrow 'the age-old pact between man and nature [...] the bonds which have preserved the balance of survival'.[491] Principally, it allows Cain to escape the gaze of the animal, calling for his response.

As though in a film, a long descriptive passage introduces the desert from above as Cain and John Parker scan the terrain for gazelles. Finally, they land at the foot of the mountain and Cain, unprotected by the helicopter's windscreen, sees the gazelle:

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[489] Ibid., 106.

[490] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 130.

[491] Van Leeuwen, 'Cars in the Desert,' 63-4.

> Her eyes were big and black and intelligent, speaking some unknown language (*tanṭuqān bi-lugha majhūla*), saying something to him, revealing a secret (*sirr*). A secret, yes, one he sensed but couldn't quite grasp (*lā yudrikuhu*). It's the hardest, most desolate thing in the world, to sense a secret and not grasp it (*ta'jiz 'an idrākihi*).[492]

Haunted by the gazelle's gaze, Cain fails to shoot. The helicopter takes off and, after some time, the gazelle is spotted again. This time, she appears as a flash of white on the ground:

> The mother gazelle's soft coat shone from afar, then she vanished as quickly as she'd appeared. The pilot flew toward it, hovering over the dark cranny where she was lurking, at the mouth of the opening, trying to protect her small calf with her body. She was trembling.[493]

Protected by the helicopter, Cain is able to turn away, close his eyes, and shoot. At this point, his and John Parker's beliefs, desires and discourses are contrasted to the gazelle's creaturely suffering as she falls, 'howling like a wolf'.[494] Cain, meanwhile, catches a glimpse of her expression: 'The look in her eyes had changed completely. Was it wretchedness (*shaqā'*)?'.[495] Through his frustration over not being able to 'grasp', or, in other words, possess and consume, the 'secret' he sees in her eyes, Cain neglects to see that, primarily, she is simply a creature clinging to life. This is further emphasised as, in the preceding chapter, a dimension of generic hybridity is brought to the encounter through fable, in which the mother gazelle tells her daughter of the pact of debt that ties Cain to them.

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[492] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 116; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 143.
[493] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 118.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 119; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 146.

Creaturely Ethics: Beast Fable and the Way of Other Worlds

In the final section of my analysis, I return to fable, considering how it comments upon the silent entreaties of animals, and emerges not merely as a stylistic convention, but a necessary means of pointing to inherent flaws in society and humanity. In many ways, it serves as a reminder of all the unwanted discourses that humans exclude, echoing the words of Le Guin:

> By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, 'Civilised Man' has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf calling him brother – not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child – not Father, but son [...] Only when the Man listens, and attends, O Best Beloved, and hears, and understands, will the Cat return to the Cat's true silence.[496]

In each of the novels, fable reveals a flaw. In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, it represents the deafness of humans to their animal others while, in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, it represents the inability of humans to relate to all others, both human and animal, beyond their wall of convictions. In each novel, this failure and inability is not necessarily related to questions of animal rights, but the simple notion of 'creaturely attention', recognising 'otherness', but not seeking to 'grasp' it. Each of the fables further communicates a creaturely ethics, representing, contesting and inverting human society, and replacing anger, selfishness and desire with the most fundamental act of hospitality that is allowing another to live. In particular, issues of 'need' and 'greed', and the perversity that results from the latter, are addressed.

[496] Le Guin, *Buffalo Gals*, 11-12.

Self-Preservation

In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, sections of fable and realism are firmly distinguished, with humans unable to hear animals speak. For this reason, the tribe's camels and donkeys are never heard speaking, while the jerboas alternate between silently scurrying presences and fully anthropomorphized animals. Meanwhile, the lizard and hedgehog, Jandūba's wise ascetics, retain their voices throughout, never coming into contact with the tribes, and therefore the novel's realist mode. Their interactions with the jerboas are my focus. Introduced towards the end of the novel, the two animals are depicted as spiritual ascetics, contemplating 'creation' (*al-kawn*) and its 'creatures' (*al-kā'ināt*).[497] Perusing the valley below, where lifeforms intermingle, they cast the human-animal drama into a broad geographic and historical perspective:

> Between these motionless landmarks were to be found living creatures, which, from the high point of the plateau, could be seen going about their daily work. They included humans, dogs, donkeys and camels, all appearing as small dots against the vast expanse, and there were many other creatures too that couldn't be seen from the heights.[498]

As the wise animals survey the view, they recall, with the help of their old friend the tortoise, 'the battles (*ma'ārik*) fought between the creatures of the valley (*aqwām hādha al-wādī*)', and particularly those 'forced on these creatures by groups of humans (*afwāj zāḥifa min al-ādamiyyīn*)'.[499] Within the novel as a whole, allusion to these battles are numerous. Firstly, there are famous historical ones, most prominently the 1913 Battle of Jandūba, fought against the Italians, and led by Sulaymān al-Bārūnī (1870-1940), in which Sheikh Abū Layla's brother, Abū Ḥamāma, is said to have fought. Secondly, there

[497] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 126.
[498] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 161.
[499] Ibid., 164.

are cultural battles, dramatised by the tensions between the tribes, reaching a climax as the same Abū Ḥamāma violently attacks young men and women at a wedding. Finally, there are battles for survival, representing the final layer in the heterotopic drama, and the dividing-line between humans and their animal others.

Contemplating all battles, the lizard and hedgehog meditate on the nature of existence as 'conflict' (*ṣirā'*) and 'self-preservation' (*ḥifẓ al-dhāt*). All creatures must participate in this struggle, with the exception of the wise friends themselves, because of their ascetic life, 'based on as little movement as possible and on food left uneaten by other animals'.[500] Within the struggle, meanwhile, humans, alone, are excessive in their violence, fighting battles based on motives more complex and pernicious than simple 'self-preservation': 'Nature answers other creatures, grants them what they need. But humans see themselves as masters of nature, devising the most fearful weapons (*asliḥat al-ibāda*) to fight it'.[501]

Humans' 'fearful weapons' are most clearly demonstrated by the insecticide which the tribe uses to destroy the insects of the valley, restoring all the horror of *ibāda* (annihilation) to the term '*mubīd li-l-ḥasharāt*' (insecticide).[502] The slaughter of the insects is depicted in language evoking a humanitarian crisis, described as '*majzara*' (massacre) and '*madhbaḥa*' (slaughter), while its victims are labelled '*qatlā*' (casualties of war).[503] Hinting at veiled allegorical messages, but also indicating al-Faqīh's critique of the destructive technologies of modernity, the comprehensiveness of human destruction is emphasised through an echo of Qur'ān 6:38, as Burhān, one of the tribe's younger generation, announces, 'No insect that crawled or flew [...] could face the new weapon and live (*mā min ḥashara zāḥifa aw ṭā'ira yumkinuhā an tanjū min hādha al-*

[500] Ibid., 133.
[501] Ibid., 134.
[502] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 196.
[503] Ibid., 203.

silāḥ)'.[504] The annihilation of the insects is also placed into cosmological perspective by Sheikh Abū Layla:

> Surely God hadn't created all those insects just so people could kill them with this deadly liquid? If people use it too much, then worms, grasshoppers, beetles, butterflies, ants, flies and other insects would disappear from the earth, after Almighty God had created them for His own purpose.[505]

Meanwhile, when 'delegates' (*mandūbūn*) from the beleaguered valley species arrive to consult the wise friends, in a scene reminiscent of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā''s 'Case of the Animals against Man', the friends are shocked to hear that the jerboas are considering matching the humans' moral perversity, recruiting city mice to spread disease among the tribes. The wise animals' response provides the novel's central ethical message:

> The spiny-tailed lizard's advice was explicit and firm. They should, he told them, put aside all thought of revenge and abandon all idea of retaliation, since this would only bring total destruction down on them. They should focus instead on one goal: to preserve themselves and their families (*al-muḥafaẓa 'alā anfusihim wa-salāmat dhawīhim*) by warding off the danger that threatened their species.[506]

Contrasting humanity's endlessly circling cycles of violence and retaliation, a creaturely ethics emerges, based in the instinct for self-preservation rather than revenge, as well as a tacit respect for the struggle of others. As Chorin puts it, 'The underlying message, which resonates well in present-day Libya, is one of connectivity of all things – individuals to people, people to animals and the environment – and the

[504] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 161; *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 196.
[505] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 162.
[506] Ibid., 167.

advantages of unity in the face of adversity'.[507] Nevertheless, while human values are 'represented, contested and inverted' through the novel's heterotopic ethics, the values suggested in their place arguably do not offer a truly viable way forward for the species, which will always fight back and seek more. The novel's ending further represents a return to the empty-handedness with which it began, seeming to hint, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, at the impossibility of envisioning harmony within plenty, and a subsequent move to apocalyptic imagery. This, too, is the vision that emerges in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, with both novels casting the potential of community and nation into doubt.

Struggle

While the sea turtle represents the symbolic heart of *Min Makka ilā hunā*, a seagull and rat form its mad, rebellious margins, where Mas'ūd escapes structures of power. Unlike in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, where fable and realism remain separate, the speech of the nonhuman, and even inanimate, coastal world is entwined in Mas'ūd's hallucinatory ravings as he spirals into insanity, torn from the human world altogether: 'He forgot the *fgi*, the Italians and the church [...] and began conversing with the chill east wind blowing from behind the hills'.[508] Sūsa's coastline becomes a battleground for Mas'ūd's inner torment, as he seeks affirmation in the sun and seagulls, interprets warning signs in the wind and waves, and perceives judgment in the eyes of crabs and turtles. Nature, in turn, speaks back, variously abusive and supportive, reflecting Mas'ūd's own fluctuating state: '"You're a ridiculous *zanjī*" said the sunlight, "A bizarre slave who enrages everyone he talks to"'.[509]

[507] Chorin, 'Homeless Rats: A Parable for Postrevolution Libya,' *Words without Borders*, January 9, 2012.
[508] Al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, 41.
[509] Ibid., 44.

In part, Mas‘ūd’s hallucinatory dialogue with nature seems to reflect the influence of humanist psychologist Erich Fromm (1900-1980) upon whom al-Nayhūm draws extensively in his theoretical work.[510] In *The Sane Society* (1955), Fromm argues that human neuroses arise from being torn from a state of harmony with the natural world. If social relationships, based on ‘love’ and ‘reason’, are not fostered to compensate, humans become ‘insane’ and, as is the case in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, cannot relate to one another or the natural world in a ‘sane’ manner, nor develop a reasoned ‘frame of orientation and devotion’.[511] In his dialogue with nature, Mas‘ūd particularly reflects Fromm’s diagnosis of narcissistic insanity: ‘The insane person has lost contact with the world; he has withdrawn into himself; he cannot experience reality, either physical or human reality *as it is*, but only as formed and determined by his own inner processes’.[512] Conveying the extent of Mas‘ūd’s psychological dislocation, *Min Makka ilā hunā* forces the reader into the same liminal zone between reality and fantasy. On several occasions, the villagers catch Mas‘ūd debating with thin air, yet on others the narrative voice declares ‘it wasn’t an illusion, it was really happening (*lam yakun dhālik wahman, kān ḥaqīqa wāqi‘a*)’.[513]

Above all, a ‘black-headed seagull’ comes to represent Mas‘ūd’s alienation and rebellion, isolated from other birds, and urging him to further conflict: ‘The black-headed seagull pierced through his loneliness (*iqtaḥama al-ṭā’ir al-aswad al-ra’s waḥdatahu*), “We’re not like the rest of the fishermen”, the bird said, broken-hearted, “We’re just two ill-fated slaves (*‘abdān mash’ūmān*)”’.[514] At one point, the seagull even likens them both to Jesus, emphasising their sense of shared solidarity and injustice:

[510] This is particularly evident in *Niqāsh* (*A Discussion*), first published in 1972.
[511] Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (Routledge: London, 2002), 23, 65.
[512] Ibid., 34.
[513] Al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, 88, 97, 100.
[514] Ibid., 99.

‘The seagull had reappeared behind the rocks, flying before him in the wind, and telling him that [...] Jesus was a fisherman like them [...]’.[515] Struggling for survival against the elements, the seagull represents Mas‘ūd’s profound psychological dislocation, and his need to retreat into the natural world through lack of relationality in the human one. At the same time, it also becomes the place where he elaborates an ethics based on justice, the simple pursuit of *rizq*, and rejection of anything beyond it.

This ethics is further elaborated in the novel’s section of ‘fable proper’, occurring at the centre of the novel, and in which the perspective of a ‘real’ rat is adopted, with whom Mas‘ūd experiences his only true friendship. Providing a momentary respite from the dark, disturbed workings of his mind, this section opens by introducing the heterotopic coastal world:

> The turtle, upturned on her back, twitched her neck nervously on the oars, swivelling her head towards the gulf in despair as a yellow sand crab scuttled over her neck and across her belly, escaping the lapping of the sea [...] At that moment, a wave came to slap him heavily again, and throw a rusty can onto his head [...] The residents of the sandy dune were having a rough time of it (*kān sukkān al-ṣāha al-ramliyya yaqḍūn waqtan ḥarijan*).[516]

From the power games of the human community, the novel hones in on the simple struggles of ‘the sandy dune’, paralleling Mas‘ūd’s own hunt for sustenance, and reminiscent of the parallel ‘human’ and ‘fable’ strands of *Fi’rān bilā juḥūr*. The rat, meanwhile, is introduced searching for its ‘scrap of bread’ (*kisrat al-khubzh*), and, behind its simple struggle, al-Nayhūm hints at a fully formed rat community, with religious belief, elders and an honest work ethic:

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[515] Ibid., 109.

[516] Ibid., 66.

> The rat, trapped on the mound, retreated, burying his face into the sand and feeling his abominable hunger, before remembering that one of the elders had once told him that *Allāh* sometimes lowers a rope from the sky to feed his hungry slaves (*'ibādahu al-juyā'*).[517]

Like the lizard and hedgehog of *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, the rat's discourse is anchored in spirituality and notions of *rizq*. As he discovers Mas'ūd's lard-smeared rope, a new source of sustenance, he thus declares 'faith is the mother of all virtues (*al-īmān ra's al-faḍā'il*)'.[518] Moving back to Mas'ūd's perspective, fable then merges with dream, as, in his sleep, Mas'ūd sees the young boy who died at sea gnawing through his rope, and gradually morphing into a rat. Rushing to the coast, Mas'ūd encounters the 'real' rat, and realises that no supernatural forces are at work, just other hungry beings. The rat's reaction is paralleled as, with pride, he realises that *Allāh* has not lowered a rope from the sky: 'he had found his food on his own on a night filled with struggle (*sirā'*) and violence (*'unf*)'.[519]

Crucially, Mas'ūd does not speak to the rat, and their encounter emerges solely through his perception that the rat, like him, is hungry. Through interweaving strands of hallucination and fable, al-Nayhūm thus creates a striking moment of mutual understanding, whose absence from the rest of the novel renders it more striking:

> When the rat raised his head, giving up all hope of escape, he found Mas'ūd observing (*yurāqibuhu*) him in stony silence (*wājiman*) from out of the fog. Their eyes met in a simple gaze, devoid of enmity. They both belonged to the same world (*kānā yantamiyān ilā 'ālam wāḥid*).[520]

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[517] Ibid.
[518] Ibid., 67.
[519] Ibid., 76.
[520] Ibid.

Throughout *Min Makka ilā hunā*, Mas'ūd 'observes' (*yurāqib*) others in 'stony silence' (*wājiman*), often conveyed through parallel syntax, emphasising his sense of alienation. Unlike the rest of his observations, however, his contemplation of the rat leads to kindness and sympathy, as he declares the animal to be 'his sole friend, united with him against the world', and gives him the rest of his rope, later making a detour to avoid startling the solitary creature.[521] Thereafter, he is constantly reminded of the rat's creaturely solitude:

> [...] a wild pigeon landed at the door of his house [...], and he observed (*rāqabahā*) it silently (*ṣāmitān*), remembering his friend, the rat, who did not possess wings, and to whom he had given his rope, so that he would not die of hunger.[522]

As Mas'ūd continues to obsess over the rat, it is repeatedly said to 'pierce through his loneliness' (*yaqtaḥim waḥdatahu*) in language identical to that describing the seagull above. In particular, he takes guilty pleasure in mentioning the rat to his wife: 'He didn't know why he kept mentioning the rat in her presence. He sensed that he was arousing her suspicions by doing so, but it also gave him a secret feeling of intimacy (*ulfa*)'.[523]

Through the intertwining of hallucination and fable, Mas'ūd moves from human conflict to psychological dislocation to an ethics of simple struggle and hospitality, elaborated through the concept of 'fishermen', who strive to earn their living. As seen above, the seagull identifies himself, Mas'ūd, and even Jesus, as 'fishermen', while Mas'ūd similarly labels the rat: 'Suddenly, it occurred to him that the rat was really a fisherman like him and had gone out to earn a scrap (*likay yaḥṣul 'alā rizqihi*). The storm

[521] Ibid., 79, 98.
[522] Ibid., 83.
[523] Ibid., 84.

had united them on the hill, as two brother fishermen'.[524] The creaturely equality of this imagined community further emerges through Mas'ūd's often coinciding use of ''*abd*' (slave/servant), and ''*ibād Allāh*' (servants of God), transforming the derogatory term applied to him by the villagers. Reclaimed from 'othering' discourses, ''*abd*' becomes an expression of Qur'ānic unity, extended to, and expressed through, animals. While Mas'ūd refers to the seagull as ''*abd*', the rat himself reflects on '*Allāh's* hungry slaves' (*'ibādahu al-juyyā'*). In later writing, al-Nayhūm also specifically distinguishes the term from '*raqīq*', arguing that the latter alone signifies 'slavery', while the former, as used in the Qur'ān, is synonymous with 'God's creatures' (*makhlūqāt Allāh*), and is often used as a symbol of resistance to oppression.[525] Sarra Tlili's reading of the term in the Qur'ān further supports this view:

> [...] in contrast to the word *insān*, which evokes mostly negative connotations, when humans are referred to as *'ibād* (sing. *'abd*: slave/subject of God; the root *'-b-d* denotes the idea of worshipping), a noticeably more positive image emerges. This is particularly the case when humans are referred to as My/Our subjects (*'ibādī*/*'ibādunā*), *'ibād* Allah (subjects of God), or *'ibād al-Raḥmān* (subjects of the most Beneficient).[526]

In evoking a heterarchical community of creatures, united by struggle, al-Nayhūm critiques the superstitious discourses and power struggles of human communities, as well as their drive towards wealth and consumerism, a prominent concern of his broader writing. In his social critical study, *al-'Awda al-muḥzina ilā al-baḥr* (1966; *Sad Return to the Sea*), for example, he analyses the story of a rich American, whose wealth infused him with a sense of the profound 'futility' (*'abath*) of existence, leading him to

[524] Ibid., 77.

[525] Al-Nayhūm, *Miḥna thaqāfa muzawwara: ṣawt al-nās am ṣawt al-fuqahā'* (London: Riad El Rayyes Books, 1991), 32.

[526] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 243.

'boredom' (*malal*), 'addiction' (*idmān*) and 'consumption' (*istihlāk*).[527] For al-Nayhūm, work, struggle and hospitality are crucial to escape such complexes, linked back to the simple premise of not putting 'one's own existence above that of another'.[528] Like al-Faqīh, he traces this back to the fundamental choice of all creatures, concerning how to gain their 'nourishment' (*ghidhā'*), and how much to gain. While he suggests that humans alone are infused with a divine spark urging them to give, he also indicates that they alone are dominated by desires (*shahwāt*), which they must control.[529]

Min Makka ilā hunā certainly portrays a society where desires, along with fear and manipulation, cause rifts between people, to the extent that Mas'ūd can only locate solace in the coastal animals. While tinged with nostalgia for the fishing communities in which al-Nayhūm grew up, the ultimate vision of humanity is pessimistic. In one scene, Mas'ūd is depicted singing the *ughniyāt al-'ilm* with his fishing partner at sea.[530] This brief moment of harmony is, however, swiftly ruined by his lies and paranoia. On another occasion, Mas'ūd and his wife briefly stop squabbling, and their moment of encounter closely parallels that with the rat:

> He turned to look at her through streams of blood and his eyes met hers in a simple gaze, devoid of depth. He had suddenly realised that she no longer had anywhere else to go in the world. He turned his face away and remained in silence.[531]

In both instances, al-Nayhūm demonstrates the cooperation possible if barriers of superstition, hatred and desire are not built. The coastal creatures, however, remain the dominant domain of affection. Through realism, hallucination and fable, the novel

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[527] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *al-'Awda al-muḥzina ilā al-baḥr* (Beirut: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2004), 74, 76
[528] Ibid., 95.
[529] Ibid.
[530] Al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, 19. The '*ughniyāt al-'ilm*' are Libyan folk songs.
[531] Ibid., 137.

dramatises the desire to recognise others and be recognised by them. This fundamental desire, evoked through Mas'ūd's silent observation, provides a suitable point to turn to *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, in which the call for one individual to respond to another is central. This response, furthermore, can only be achieved far from the structures of society, and through principles of self-sacrifice, moving beyond the ethics of self-preservation and struggle in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Min Makka ilā hunā* to an even more explicit rejection of the abundance and accumulation upon which community is founded.

Self-sacrifice

Chapter Twenty-One of *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, '*al-'Ahd*' ('The Covenant'), is told through the perspective of a gazelle and her daughter, preceding the chapters in which Cain and John Parker kill both, and juxtaposing creaturely ethics to human brutality. Contrasting the panoramic view from John Parker's helicopter, the section, as Sa'īd al-Ghānamī comments, reflects how al-Kūnī's writing often fluctuates between distanced narration of human drama and what he terms '*rāwī ḥabal al-warīd*' (the narrator of the jugular vein), through which nonhuman beings and elements are conferred speech, drawing on both traditional tales and Sufi narrative.[532] Crucially, this shift reveals the disparity between 'speaking animals who are not aware', embodied by Cain, and 'mute animals who are aware'.[533]

In the chapter, the gazelle, sheltering from Cain in the mountains, relates to her lonely daughter the history of their 'nation' (*waṭan*), based on principles of restraint and self-sacrifice, in order to explain to her why they have remained when all other gazelles

[532] Sa'īd al-Ghānamī, *Malḥamat al-ḥudūd al-quṣwā: al-mukhyāl al-ṣaḥrāwī fī adab Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-'Arabī, 2000), 109.
[533] Ibid.

have migrated south.[534] First, she relays how the world was created, and how the nature of its creation requires creatures to remain in their natural habitat. The Creator, she explains, assigned three frontiers to the soul: time, place and body. These three 'prisons' are the 'destiny for every creature', and any who attempt to infringe them are, as she declares, 'cursed and consigned to perdition'.[535] Long ago, however, one gazelle, made arrogant by his mighty horns, attempted to leave the sandy plains and scale the desert's highest peak. So the Creator sent a wild bird to destroy him.

The gazelle's words, a metaphysical translation of instinctual habits and habitats, are both abstract and rooted in animal life, exemplifying Oerlemans' reference to fable as codifying 'human *and* animal wisdom'.[536] As the daughter argues back, meanwhile, humans, rather than arrogant gazelles, emerge as the ultimate villains. As the young foal declares, the herds have migrated south not out of arrogance, but because of Cain's violence, forcing them to break natural covenants. This is further emphasised as the mother gazelle explains her second reason for remaining: a particular covenant ties her and her offspring to Cain, forbidding him from killing them. This leads her to recall how, when she was a young foal, her mother decided to sacrifice her life for the baby Cain when he and his family were lost and dying in the desert. The herd leader encouraged her sacrifice:

> 'God,' she said, 'honoured all creatures and gave them life. Then, to test their endurance (*ṣabrahā*), He set them in the desert. He placed his secret (*sirr*) in the scarce water, and He placed a further secret in dreadful sacrifice (*al-qurbān al-*

[534] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 123.
[535] Ibid, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 100.
[536] Oerlemans, 'The Animal in Allegory,' 6.

qāsī). He who sacrifices himself (*man ḍaḥḥā bi-nafsihi*) to save another's life sees into that secret and wins immortality'.[537]

The gazelle leader's tale establishes existence as a test not of self-preservation but altruism, a trait shared by many animals in al-Kūnī's work. These self-sacrificial animals are, however, far from passive. As stated, almost all of the encounters between humans and animals in *Nazīf al-ḥajar* are based on animals calling humans to respond both to their indebtedness to them, and to the animals' equal desire for life and survival. In this way, the leader informs the gazelle that her death will protect her offspring:

> Through all the earth there is nothing stronger than the bond of blood, and no crime more hateful than its betrayal [...] We and humankind, I say, are brothers now. And this bond of safety was bought with cruel blood.[538]

As seen, however, the gazelle leader's wisdom proves false, and rescuing the infant Cain leads to the slaughter of all the desert gazelles, including the one who gave her life for his. In this way, creaturely ethics is rendered void by the encroaching force of modernity, poignantly conveyed by the death of the last desert gazelle. Through a kaleidoscope of narrative perspectives, this gazelle shifts between a mysterious being with secrets in her eyes, a vulnerable mother, dying victim, and teller of creaturely ethics. Cain fails to respond to all, and is ultimately depicted as a cannibal: 'That night, Cain, son of Adam, didn't just kill his sister. He ate her flesh too'.[539] In order to reveal the heinousness of Cain's actions, al-Kūnī draws upon one pact and one taboo that humans do still preserve, preventing them, at least, from eating one another.

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[537] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 102; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 126.
[538] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 103-4.
[539] Ibid.

To a greater extent than *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Min Makka ilā hunā*, creaturely ethics in *Nazīf al-ḥajar* is therefore connected to an original state of harmony, often evoked in al-Kūnī's work through the '*namūs*', an ancient, divinely-given law conveying natural, cultural and spiritual wisdom. Lost by humans' first ancestors, it remains only in fragments, and recuperating it is an increasing preoccupation in al-Kūnī's writing, dramatised in his novels and collections of proverbs. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, it is not explicitly mentioned, but emerges in primordial form, through the ethics derived from animals, and voiced by them.[540] Alongside fable, for example, Asūf's father tells him about 'the ways (*akhlāq*, also meaning 'morals') of animals' at night, dwelling on their nobility, fidelity and bravery.[541] In addition, animals save human lives on four occasions, and, in two of these instances, sacrifice their own in the process.

As with al-Faqīh and al-Nayhūm's creaturely ethics, the '*nāmūs*' is fundamentally a commentary on human society and its destructive desires, contrasting them to simpler values, rooted in the creaturely and spiritual. Particular parallels emerge between al-Kūnī and al-Nayhūm. Despite their differing visions of nation and society, both emphasise the need for individual responsibility, and for remaining alert to the dangers of plenty. In al-Kūnī's short story, '*al-Fakhkh*' (1991; 'The Trap'), for example, he portrays a nomad like Asūf, who, momentarily bored in a time of plenty, traps and kills a pregnant *waddān*, and is punished for his act by a powerful jinni. Revealing the consequences that arise from even momentary 'laxity' (*istirkhā'*), the nomad's recourse to idle 'entertainment' (*tasliya*) echoes al-Nayhūm's critique in *al-'Awda al-muḥzina ilā al-baḥr*.[542] In al-Nayhūm's children's story '*Bā'i' al-milḥ al-ṭayyib al-qalb*' ('The good-

[540] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Al-Nāmūs: Baḥthan 'an nāmūs wāw (Nuṣūṣ)* (Beirut: Dār al-Fāris li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1998).

[541] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 18; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 29.

[542] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, '*al-Fakhkh*,' in *Dīwān al-nathr al-barrī*, 39-74 (Limassol: Dār al-Tanwīr li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1991).

hearted salt-seller'), meanwhile, a salt-seller, mirroring Mas'ūd in many ways, is lured by the temptation of quick wealth, offered by a jinni.[543] In both, the protagonist becomes villain, and harmful desires are located within the individual rather than figures of power. The presence of jinn in both is also suggestive of more intriguing comparisons between the authors. Here, however, I remain with creaturely vulnerability, examining, in my next chapter, how, in *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, it is tied to spirituality.

Conclusion

In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, hybrid animal aesthetics, juxtaposing realism to fable, are central to the communication of heterotopic ethics, animated by the struggle of animals and outcast humans. Depicting existence as a battle, each novel questions which battles are worth fighting, how much *rizq* is needed, and how to respond, with hospitality, to the other, whether of tribe or species. While not promoting an explicit animal rights perspective, and even dramatising the need to hunt jerboas, turtles and the odd gazelle, the novels formulate a poetics of 'creaturely attention' as a way back to morality. In all three, sections of beast fable, like the creaturely fellowship examined in Part One, offer a simpler way of being in contrast to the conflicted drama of the wider narrative. In all three, this leads to ambivalent, or explicitly negative, verdicts concerning the potential for harmonious community. As will be seen next, this ambivalence emerges most powerfully through visions of apocalypse and spiritual encounter, in which wealth is swept away, establishing a tabula rasa from which society must begin anew.

[543] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Bā'i' al-milḥ al-ṭayyib al-qalb*,' in *Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*, 21-30.

Chapter 4 – Silent Beasts: Spiritual Encounter, Creaturely Death and the Return to Beginnings

Commenting on the donkey, Balthazar, in French director Robert Bresson's (1901-1999) *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), Anat Pick evokes the revelatory power that an animal's silence can convey in the midst of oppressive circumstances:

> The silence of the animals in the face of all that is said and done to them returns to the idea of martyrdom or rather to the notion of the saint. A saint does not pontificate [...] A saint reaches others not by canvassing but as embodied revelation. Suffering becomes saintly when its inarticulacy is revealed as a refusal to speak. Thus the powerlessness of those who do or cannot participate in a given discourse paradoxically carries its own inalienable force [...] Silence in Bresson has an almost material quality, which makes God's presence felt through and as the vacuum of his absence.[544]

For Pick, Balthazar's silence moves him beyond both anthropomorphic and symbolic interpretations, cutting through the film's broader 'allegorical paraphernalia'.[545] Bearing witness to the 'human wickedness around him', he becomes an embodiment of 'creaturely suffering', in which Pick identifies notions of both sainthood and divinity, emerging from the everyday exposure of the donkey to 'chance' (*au hasard*).[546]

In this chapter, I examine animals in Libyan fiction as such embodiments, exploring how their silence moves beyond the dimensions of fable, as well as the novels' broader 'allegorical paraphernalia'. Primarily, I consider how they initiate new orders of being, often in apocalyptic form, and serving to reaffirm the notion of *arḍ Allāh* (the land of

[544] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 189-190.
[545] Ibid., 190.
[546] Ibid.

God) as a zone beyond human discourses and divisions. Shifting my focus to the endings of Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm's *Min Makka ilā hunā* and Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, I consider how Sufi and environmental, spiritual and creaturely consciousnesses emerge in tandem, transcending the novels' generic and symbolic complexities, and reducing the characters to empty-handedness. Serving as a culmination to the human-animal encounters around which the novels are structured, these endings both deploy the mythic and symbolic, and move beyond them.

Water, in the form of storm, sea or flood, represents a central element in these endings, joining human and animal in heterotopic moments, and transforming the dynamics of the fight for survival. While evoking mythic connotations of purification and punishment, water, above all, represents a material force, reasserting the creaturely nature of all. In wider Arabic literature, this combined mythic, political and material force is perhaps most powerfully deployed in Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's famous '*Unshūdat al-maṭar*' (1960; 'Hymn of the Rain'), in which the plight of the modern nation is imagined through an apocalyptic storm on the Iraqi gulf. As Sinan Antoon comments:

> Both universal and mythical, yet viscerally material as well, rain as an organizing concept allows the poet to represent the paradox of life and nature. Rain, and by extension water, is denied to those who need it most in the poem [...] While it starts with serene and bucolic beauty, nature is never pure and one's relationship to it is always conditioned and governed by power and injustice. Water, the giver of life, can always take it away.[547]

[547] Sinan Antoon, 'On al-Sayyab's "Rain Song",' *Juniata Voices* 11 (2011): 15.

Commenting on the poem's mythic significance, Terri de Young further observes the importance of annihilation within the connotations of rain: 'Only the storm – complete destruction of the existing order – can restore the missing God, or in secular terms, the missing spirit of harmony, order and justice in the cosmos'.[548]

Joining visions of physical suffering with political critique and apocalyptic imagery, water is similarly evocative in Libyan fiction, reflecting its centrality to the country's inhabitants. As Ethan Chorin observes, water has long represented a foil to oil in the country, with its lack constraining the opportunities afforded by the latter, and with Gaddafi striving to exert as much control over both 'as humanly possible'.[549] In 'Umar al-Kiddī's '*Jālib al-maṭar*' (2012; 'The Bringer of Rain'), this hubristic attitude is depicted as Gaddafi seizes a mythic character named Amṭīr, destined from birth to be followed by a raincloud:

> [...] he (Gaddafi) expounded the Revolution's resolve to transform the desert into a green paradise, and elaborated on current plans for the Great Manmade River [...] Amṭīr, he said, was the final divine attempt to rescue life in North Africa, and the Manmade River was the final human attempt.[550]

Water, in al-Kiddī's story, dramatises the hubristic power of a tyrant, attempting to lay claim to life itself. In *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, meanwhile, water is employed to reassert human humility and redress balance in existing orders. The first section of this chapter therefore examines how this process takes place through encounters with animals. Examining particular moments in which animals are silent, or tracking characters' encounters with species which do not talk, I conclude

[548] Terri Deyoung, 'A New Reading of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb's "Hymn of the Rain",' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24, no. 1 (1993): 39-61.
[549] Chorin, *Exit Gaddafi*, 13-14.
[550] Al-Kiddī, '*Jālib al-maṭar*,' 146.

with a comparative analysis of the 'creaturely gaze' in al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī. Focussing on the combined significance of animals' silence and mortality, I then explore *al-Ṭāḥūna* (1985; *The Mill*) by Sālim al-Hindāwī (b. 1954), *al-Tābūt* (2003; *The Coffin*) by 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl (b. 1961) and '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*' (2010; 'The Wonderful Short Life of the Dog Ramadan') by 'Umar al-Kiddī (b. 1959).

Silence and Storms: Reaffirming *arḍ Allāh*

As explored in Chapter Three, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* are centred around the language of battle and struggle, and, in all three, animals become the focus of this, as sources of *rizq,* competitors for it, or victims of human excess. In all three novels, however, animals also move beyond conflict, becoming the locus of spiritual unity as, through divine agency and encounter, humans respond to the creaturely nature of animals, and identify their own within it. These shifts come in lieu of the wealth desired, whether in the form of the tribe's barley, Mas'ūd's three francs, or Cain's roasted *waddān* meat. In this way, the focus of each novel shifts from human society, explored through the accumulation of wealth, to alternative domains of reflection, characterised by empty-handedness.

Jerboas in the Flood

The final image in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* is of a divinely-sent flood engulfing Jandūba, culminating the religious discourses which traverse the novel. Throughout, the tribe's piety is a defining feature, expressed in constant evocations of *Allāh's* omnipotence and omniscience, with the most oft-repeated phrase being 'If *Allāh* permits' (*bi-idhni-Allāh*).[551] When despairing of finding food, Sheikh Abū Layla also urges his people not to despair of divine bounty, giving *Allāh* a central role in the giving and removing of *rizq*,

[551] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 30, 31, 32.

and declaring that He 'watches over the matters of existence' (*yar'ā shu'ūn al-kawn*).[552] Furthermore, the Sheikh first takes his people to Jandūba because he believes it to be 'a land blessed by God' (*arḍ mubāraka*).[553] In this way, the heterotopia of Jandūba is charged, in the tribe's eyes, with spiritual significance, coinciding with divine agency becoming, or appearing to become, an actual actant within the narrative, connected to both the appearance and disappearance of the barley.

Firstly, 'Alī discovers the barley following the impassioned prayers of his grandmother, al-Ḥājja Khadīja, appearing to represent a direct response to them: 'All each of us needs, oh God [...] is a morsel of barley bread (*kisrat min khubz al-sha'īr*) to keep us alive [...] Just a morsel of bread [...] Grant us this, oh bountiful Lord'.[554] However, as the novel concludes, it is animals, not humans, who receive divine prophecy in the form of a sacred chameleon, hearing an 'invisible call' (*hātif*) that instructs her and the other valley animals to take shelter on the mountain and await forthcoming 'salvation' (*al-khalāṣ*).[555] In a neat inversion of the Noah's ark story, animals, rather than humans, are warned of the flood, and, deaf to the chameleon's prophecy, the humans watch in confusion as the animals enter a state of agitation, with their unintelligible calls emphasised:

> All the animals in the camp had woken together, sending out cries of terror. The grunting of the camels, the barking of the dogs, the braying of the donkeys were all mingled, confusedly, with other sounds coming from the unknown. The shrill call of birds, the buzzing of invisible insects surrounded them.[556]

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[552] Ibid., 30.

[553] Ibid., 37.

[554] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 45; *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 57.

[555] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 232. Hans Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1193.

[556] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 197.

In the novel's powerful culminating image, jerboas and humans flee together, exposed to floodwater rather than protected by an ark. Acting like the 'merciless sun' which begins the novel, the flood is a leveller, transforming all species into struggling creatures: 'These creatures had fled the water just as they had, as if their two fates were bound together (*ka'anna maṣīrahā irtabaṭa bi-maṣīrihim*)'.[557] Through this mutual exposure, the tribe's attention finally shifts from songs, jokes and stories to the jerboas themselves. The barley is swept away, and, as some lament its loss, another asks: 'Do you mean the jerboas' barley'.[558] This comment, heard as though for 'the first time', provokes both hysterical laughter and weeping, as one person responds 'Hahaha. You're right Burhān! Hahaha. It *is* the jerboas' barley (*innahā fi'lan sha'īr al-jarābī'*)!'[559]

As the flood finally retreats, the novel concludes with reference to the sounds made by the jerboas, incomprehensible to humans, and providing a final, striking contrast to the novel's fable sections: 'Some of the jerboas were wailing just as the women and children were. It was a mournful wailing (*bukā' ḥazīn*), lost amid the clamour of the people's cries and the roaring of the flood'.[560] In the competing strands of 'human' and 'animal', 'realism' and 'fable', the jerboas' 'voice' has the last word, conveying creaturely struggle upon the land, the final shared ground between self and other, accessible only when all are similarly exposed to what al-Faqīh, in his introduction, describes as the 'harshness of the environment' and 'difficulty of historical circumstances'.[561] Obliterating all possessions, the flood finally recalls an earlier point in the novel, when Sheikh Abū Layla remembers how '*Allāh's* country' (*bilād Allāh*) was once '*Allāh's* land' (*arḍ Allāh*), spiritually and environmentally united beyond divisions

[557] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 203; *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 247.
[558] Ibid.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 6

of ownership.[562] Concluding with the destruction of the barley stores, the novel thus leaves the future of society and nation ambiguous, with struggle continuing to define all, and strikingly paralleling the ending of *Min Makka ilā hunā.*

Turtle in the Bay

As its title suggests, Islamic faith is as central to *Min Makka ilā hunā* as it is to *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*. In their interpretations of the title, authors Abū Bakr al-Hūnī (dates unknown) and Manṣūr Būshnāf (b. 1954) both emphasise the fact that the title is 'From *Mecca* to *Here*' and not 'From *Here* to *Mecca*'. For Būshnāf, the movement from 'Mecca to here' indicates al-Nayhūm's critique of the transformations undergone by Islam since the time of the Prophet, accruing harmful superstitions through the work of figures such as the *fgi*.[563] For al-Hūnī, it simply indicates the unrestricted presence of *Allāh* in all places and people.[564] Al-Hūnī's interpretation, written in 1970, following conversations with al-Nayhūm, is perhaps closer to the mark, but both reflect the author's focus on critiquing religious idols, and asserting the omnipresent nature of the divine, as Sālim al-Hindāwī comments:

> Al-Ṣādiq's concern, in his literary, political and religious writing, was to defeat idols, to make you see yourself naked in the mirror, with *Allāh* behind you, lighting a match so you might find your way out of the house and towards knowledge.[565]

This spirit is powerfully present in *Min Makka ilā hunā*. As with the Eid sheep, al-Nayhūm critiques religious superstitions through the legends the *fgi* weaves around

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[562] Ibid., 38.

[563] Manṣūr Bushnāf, '*Bi-l-yusrā: min hunā ilā Makka*,' *alwasat*, February 2, 2011, accessed May 3, 2016, http://www.alwasat.ly/ar/news/kottab/2665/.

[564] Abū Bakr al-Hūnī, '*al-Ṭarīq ilā inkār al-dhāt*,' in al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-l-thalj: 'an al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm*, 47-52.

[565] Sālim al-Hindāwī, '*al-'Ā'id ilā Benghāzī*,' *al-Nāqid* 83 (1995): 40.

the turtles, while also offering an alternative paradigm in which there are no intermediaries between the individual and *Allāh*. From its entrapment in iconographies of power, the turtle, silent throughout, in contrast to the anthropomorphised rat and talking seagull, moves the novel towards spiritual encounter, concluding with the juxtaposed images of Mas'ūd and the *fgi* confronting it. Through these images, the *fgi's* idolatry is contrasted to Mas'ūd's realisation that encounters with *Allāh* are from 'within', a shift in consciousness conveyed through repetition of imagery and syntax, as his silent observation gains spiritual dimensions:

> He looked up at the sky towards *Allāh*. He thought he could see Him, and knew he must contemplate Him in silence, putting everything else behind him: the sea turtle; the *fgi*; the *fgi's* cousins armed with sticks; his wife; the dead boy; the storm; and his three francs [...] And with that, he lay down on the western rocks and began to observe *Allāh* in stony silence (*ṭafaqa yurāqib Allāh wājiman*).[566]

Alongside repetition of Mas'ūd's 'observation', discussed in Chapter Three, the novel's imagery of 'storms', 'hunting', 'fishermen' and 'battles' also shifts from the *fgi's* stories of *Allāh's* punitive wrath to spiritual encounter:

> *Allāh* finds the fisherman in the bay, whether in Benghāzī or Sūsa. He finds him from within (*yajiduhu min al-dākhil*), I'm telling you. He doesn't look for him with his club-wielding cousins or set wind and an idiotic turtle on him. *Allāh* finds the fisherman from within (*Allāh yajid al-ṣayyād min al-dākhil*).[567]

Finally, Mas'ūd comes to a realisation of his place within an equal world, which, through the terms *'abd* (servant/creature) and *dābba* (beast), subtly also incorporates the seagull and rat: '*Allāh's* not only on the side of the storm, He's on my side as well.

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[566] Al-Nayhūm, *Min Makka ilā hunā*, 125-6.
[567] Ibid., 130.

That's just the way *Allāh* is. I'm simply an ignorant slave (*'abd jāhil*), after all, just a beast (*dābba*). But I'm telling you, *Allāh's* on all our sides'.[568]

Despite this shift in consciousness, following the *fgi's* announcement that a male turtle has come to avenge the female that Mas'ūd killed, the latter insists on going to meet the creature, which is ironically described entering the bay with, 'the full weight of *Allāh* and the dark heavens on his shoulders'.[569] As Mas'ūd rows to meet him, the reader must decide whether this 'bay' is a metaphorical or literal one, and whether Mas'ūd has surpassed the *fgi's* discourses and discovered *Allāh* 'within':

> It all seemed real enough. In a certain way it also seemed divine. That he was in the bay was a superficial reality, but it was also divine. He had come on time as usual, to defend his three francs, and he had nowhere else to go, nor did he want to go anywhere else. He had grown accustomed to follow his nose, with *Allāh* at his side, continuing onwards without a second thought until someone happened to shove him from behind, and he fell on his face. *Allāh* alone could do that, and He could do that right now. The turtle, on the other hand, didn't stand a chance.[570]

Like the turtle, sea and storms are used by the *fgi* as discursive weapons, threatening Mas'ūd and the villagers. Both, however, also become the only place, outside the turmoil of society, where Mas'ūd can contemplate *Allāh* without fear. The bay, both 'real' and 'divine', subsumes the turtle, and all other conflicts, within an all-encompassing evocation of *Allāh*. Parallelling the flooded '*arḍ Allāh*' of Jandūba, it allows the natural world, and specifically the turtle, to regain its creaturely nature beyond the discourses of the *fgi*.

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[568] Ibid., 105.
[569] Ibid., 117.
[570] Ibid., 145-46.

Depicting not divine agency, as in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, but spiritual encounter, stripped of supernatural happenings, the novel then shifts to the *fgi*, who sees the turtle coming to shore. Immediately, he realises that it is not a male, come to avenge Mas'ūd, but a female, come to lay her eggs. Despite being manipulated into his fallacious discourses, she is simply acting according to seasonal cycles, silent and impassive to the human drama around her. Unwilling to forsake his 'piece of divinity', the *fgi* casts her eggs into the sea, representing a final act of injustice to both Mas'ūd and the turtles. As the former drifts through the bay, contemplating *Allāh*, the novel's concluding images therefore leave little room for the imagining of harmonious community. The *fgi* will retain his grip over the village, while Mas'ūd moves into the worlds of coastal animals and spiritual reflection.[571]

Emerging through rats, seagulls and turtles, and grounded in elemental reality, this reflection represents an expression of what, as discussed in Chapter One, al-Nayhūm refers to as 'naïve Sufism' (*al-ṣūfiyya al-bulahā'*) and universal 'love' (*ḥubb*) within his work.[572] This spirit, contrasting his more pronounced satire, emerges through use of both fable and human-animal encounter, bringing 'playfulness' to the novel, but also a deeper spirit of spiritual searching.[573] Perhaps significantly, the themes, aesthetics and coastal setting of *Min Makka ilā hunā* are also paralleled in another of his children's stories, simply titled '*Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*' (1966; 'A Children's Story'), and again embodying the spirit of 'naïve Sufism'.[574] Depicting an old sailor, living alone on the Libyan coast, the story dramatises human-animal bonds:

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[571] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 29.

[572] Al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj*, 322. See page 77 of Chapter One for further discussion of this.

[573] Al-Faqīh, '*Ṣāḥib al-nufūdh*,' 47.

[574] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Min qiṣaṣ al-aṭfāl*,' in al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq mughaṭṭāh bi-thalj: 'an al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm*, 101-106.

> The seagulls were his friends, and he liked to watch them gather to peck up the bread he left them, then take off in a cloud of shining white, like snowflakes all along the bay. Sometimes, he would save all his food for them and satisfy himself with chewing on a crust of bread and sipping some tea or looking for a sandcrab [...] He liked to pursue these creatures, letting them bite his finger while he pulled off their horns and legs, talking to them and feeling great affection for them, despite being forced to eat them.[575]

As in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, the Libyan coast emerges as a place of both struggle and friendship, and, as ʻAṭiyya remarks, al-Nayhūm's portrayal of it seems to be simply infused with his own love of it.[576] In a letter to friend and fellow author Khalīfa al-Fākhirī, al-Nayhūm indeed describes how the coast was a place where he would escape his frustrations with society:

> The place (Sūq al-Ḥashīsh)[577] covered me in rust. It made me close my eyes and long to die, and I would escape to the sea, to Salīm's boat and his little dog, and the scuttling crabs. I would run after them, kill them and pull off their legs, all the while talking to them. I would spit on them then wash myself in the depths of the sea, to get rid of the rust and return to life.[578]

In all his depictions of retreat into nature, al-Nayhūm portrays not a romanticised ideal, but struggle for survival and social change. Nevertheless, this retreat undoubtedly also permits expressions of passion, friendship and contemplation that human society does not, moving into visions of creaturely hospitality and naïve

[575] Ibid., 102.
[576] ʻAṭiyya, *Fī-l-adab al-lībī al-ḥadīth*, 90.
[577] Where al-Nayhūm grew up.
[578] Al-Kubtī, ed., *Nawāris*, 31-2.

Sufism. This, similarly, is the function of wilderness and animals in al-Kūnī's *Nazīf al-ḥajar*.

Waddān in the Rain

Combining elements from both *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Min Makka ilā hunā*, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* draws together spiritual encounter with images of divine agency. Both centre on the *waddān*, which, to a greater extent than either jerboas or turtles, is infused with myth, mysticism and saintliness. As elusive in wider literature as it is in life, the *waddān* exists primarily in Tuareg folklore, where it is shrouded in legend. Due to overhunting, it is now also an endangered species, and both its legendary status and vulnerability are central to al-Kūnī's work, where it is an entirely silent presence, communicating through its gaze, its physical entanglement with humans, and the legends which inform both. Appearing in almost all al-Kūnī's fiction, it represents one of the most intriguing and sustained portrayals of animals in contemporary fiction today.

Caught between Asūf and Cain, the *waddān* in many ways mirrors the silent turtle of *Min Makka ilā hunā*, battled over by Mas'ūd and the *fgi*. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, however, it is Asūf who perpetuates the myth of the *waddān*, while Cain strips the *waddān* and the wider desert of their myths, seeking only to consume. Far from pernicious superstition, myth becomes a way of conferring subjectivity on the nonhuman. As with al-Nayhūm's turtle, however, the animal's physicality is also emphasised, leading, alongside mythic imagery, to moments of transformative insight. Asūf's father, for example, mirrors Mas'ūd in being both afraid of the animal he must hunt, and haunted by its suffering. In one hunting expedition, he causes a cornered *waddān* to commit suicide in despair, and is wracked by guilt:

> The blood gushed out from his nostrils, and, after he was dead, his eyes were open and that strange look was still there – the mixture of wretchedness and

> rancour and helplessness (*al-shaqā' wa-l-ḥiqd wa-l-ya's*) [...] I can't get that strange, possessed *waddān* out of my mind.[579]

Later, the father refers to the animal as '*miskīn al-wāddān al-maskūn*' (the poor, possessed *waddān*), emphasising its dual nature as wretched and mysterious through the play on '*miskīn*' (poor, miserable) and '*maskūn*' (haunted, possessed).[580] Focussing on this dual nature, I trace Asūf's encounters with the animal, and the spirit in which he encounters it, paving the way for the novel's concluding image of rain. These encounters are diverse in nature, moving from hunting to metamorphosis, self-sacrifice and companionship. All represent variations on what, as discussed in Chapter Two, Hélène Claudot-Hawad describes as pursuit of animal as metaphor for pursuit of knowledge in Tuareg tradition.[581] In all, the *waddān* remains silent, encountering Asūf through moments of shared gaze, and physical and mythical entanglement.

Asūf, meanwhile, exemplifies the frame of mind in which these pursuits must be carried out. Contrary to the '*carno-phallogocentric*' Cain, he embodies Derrida's concept of 'eating well', a metonymic term for ideal encounter with the 'other', which, as Derrida writes, is 'something one can never do [...] without absolutely limiting understanding itself, the identifying appropriation'.[582] Embracing a spirit of non-understanding, Asūf's encounters emphasise both the unknowability of the 'other', but also its unity with the self, providing the thread that ties together the novel's mythic and mystical layers, and is also central to al-Kūnī's particular vision of environmental justice:

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[579] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 20; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 31.

[580] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 31.

[581] Claudot-Hawad, *Éperonner Le Monde*, 104.

[582] Jacques Derrida, '"Eating Well" or the Calculation of the Subject,' in *Points... Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 283.

> Je me suis toujours intéressé au problème de l'unité de la creation et même de l'unité de la creation et du créateur. Dieu, l'homme et l'animal se trouvent unis dans un seul corps qui s'appelle le Sahara. C'est pourquoi, quand nous tuons un *waddān* (moufflon) nous portons atteinte à nous-mêmes.[583]

In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, mystical unity is most prominently conveyed through the mythic bonds which tie Asūf and his father to the *waddān*. Exemplifying the spirit of the above quotation, the species' fate is bound to theirs, beginning with a 'vow' (*nadhr*) that the father makes after being rescued by a *waddān* from a cliff edge, swearing that neither he nor his descendants will hunt another.[584] *'Nadhr*', signifying both 'vow' and 'votive offering', enters both into a sacrificial relationship with the species, with the life of one becoming a ransom for the other. Shortly after, as drought strikes the desert, for example, Asūf's father must choose whether to break his vow and hunt another *waddān* or die of starvation alongside his pregnant wife. Ultimately, he kills a *waddān*, and, despite the extremity of his circumstances, this represents an unforgivable betrayal, and his death is depicted as a direct consequence. After departing on yet another hunting expedition, Asūf eventually finds him at the bottom of a cliff, his neck broken like the first *waddān* he drove to suicide.

Asūf, meanwhile, respects his father's vow, until, one day, he finds himself helplessly drawn to pursue the animal:

> Some unknown power was pushing him to it. He forgot the vow, forgot his father's fate. Wonderment, beyond his power to resist, drove him on. His father had said, and so had his mother, that the spirit of the *waddan* attracts, stupefies, robs a man of his mind, takes all his will away. Then the hunter finds himself

[583] Al-Kūnī, 'Le discours du désert,' 298.

[584] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 55-6.

> dispossessed, led away, haunted, leaping on his own four limbs as he chases the beast over the smooth, hard rocks.[585]

Unlike Cain and John Parker in their helicopter, Asūf's pursuit is highly precarious. Running on all fours, he appears to transform into the animal he is following and, after slinging a rope around it, is eventually pulled along uncontrollably: 'the chase went on. Only it wasn't a chase. Rather a kind of dragging and scraping along the ground'.[586] Injured and losing control, Asūf blurs the categories of predator and prey, and shifts the traditional paradigms of the hunt from celebration of culture, community and chivalry to spiritual, creaturely journey.

Finally, the *waddān*, described as his 'victim-executioner', plunges him over an abyss where he faces imminent death. Despairing, he attributes his predicament to divine punishment, and gives up all hope of rescue, declaring: 'There are no miracles in the desert. If you fall into the trap, you have to get out alone'.[587] The *waddān*, however, reappears above him, throwing down the rope which Asūf had used to lasso it, and embodying the miracle of which Asūf had despaired. At this point, at his most physically vulnerable, Asūf exchanges a gaze with the *waddān*, conveying a vision of unity on a creaturely, mythical and mystical level: 'Suddenly, in the dimness of the glow, he saw his father in the eyes of the great, patient *waddan* [...] The eyes that had chosen a cruel freedom without ever quite knowing why'.[588] On one level, Asūf's recognition is based in the myths surrounding father, son and *waddān*, suggesting that his father has migrated into the body of the animal. On another, it reveals Asūf's perception of his own sadness, patience and struggle in the *waddān*, realising their kinship as creatures within the harsh desert. Finally, as he cries out 'You're my father. I

[585] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 46.
[586] Ibid., 49.
[587] Ibid., 52.
[588] Ibid., 61.

recognized you', his exclamation is described 'as if communing with his God', adding a further mystical dimension to the layers of meaning within the gaze.[589]

After this encounter, Asūf's physical entanglement with the animal continues through his metamorphosis, dramatising the fullest expression of response to the 'other' as relinquishment of 'self', and standing in opposition to Cain and John Parker's meat-eating. Narrated in flashback, Asūf metamorphoses into a *waddān* after descending into an oasis for the first time as a result of drought. On his first day, he is captured by Colonel Bordello of the Italian army, gathering troops to fight in Ethiopia. As he and the other prisoners are 'packed together like sheep', Asūf transforms into a *waddān*, breaking through his bonds and escaping to the wilderness.[590]

This metamorphosis, a motif that rarely features in modern Arabic literature, has most often been interpreted as a symbol of revolt against injustice and power, with many critics drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of *becoming-animal* and *nomadology*, signifying all that opposes the monolithic power of the state.[591] Miriam Cooke, for example, comments:

> This reality of his becoming-waddan happens in the space of flux where the subaltern is at home and the state is not [...] on the border where the magical reserves of the periphery can be mobilized in order to challenge tyranny, greed and violence.[592]

Susan McHugh similarly argues that:

> In terms of nomadology, his novels thus feature an ongoing struggle, wherein, surrounding the subject of the state [...] ranges the nomad of the intermezzo,

[589] Ibid., 61.
[590] Ibid., 73.
[591] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (New York: The Athlone Press Ltd, 2007), 34-7.
[592] Miriam Cooke, 'Magical Realism in Libya,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 41 (2010): 21.

> the vagabond of no-man's-land, who is constantly on the move, metamorphosing in a 'fuzzy aggregate' of alliances.[593]

Asūf's metamorphosis is, indeed, subversive of centralised powers, but both interpretations miss its significance as an exploration of the oneness-of-being, a holistic union replacing that of 'state apparatus'. Elmarsafy comes closer to the mark: 'Using the unity of Being as a starting-point, al-Koni's writing unfolds where transformation and metamorphosis are the norm. These transformations, these becomings, are the very stuff of writing for Deleuze and Guattari'.[594] Significantly, Asūf's metamorphosis is depicted as both '*taḥawwul*' (transformation) and '*ḥulūl*' (divine indwelling) and, through this double identification, human, animal and divine merge in a hybrid formation that is, as remarked by Ferial Ghazoul, also one.[595] Furthermore, Asūf is rescued not only from imprisonment, but the need to join community, as, after his transformation back into a human, he and his herds are granted rain: 'He went to Massak Mallat, where he tended his herd of camels. And there God opened for him a door He'd open only to his saints: a passing cloud crossed the lower wadis, and they flowed with water'.[596] This mention of divinely granted water importantly pre-empts the novel's denouement, in the form of Asūf's final act of self-sacrifice, the culmination of his other encounters with the *waddān*, which again brings rain to the desert.

In refusing to guide Cain to the *waddān*, Asūf effectively offers his life for theirs. Driven to distraction by lack of meat, Cain begins hallucinating that Asūf is the *waddān* he has been craving, tying him to an ancient rock frescoe and slaughtering him. Asūf,

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[593] Susan McHugh, 'Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim al-Koni's "Composite Apparition",' *Comparative Critical Studies* 9, no. 3 (2012): 299.
[594] Elmarsafy, *Sufism*, 125.
[595] Al-Ghazoul, '*al-Riwāya al-ṣūfiyya*,' 35.
[596] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 74.

meanwhile, becomes fully identified with the prehistoric portrait of the *waddān*: 'His body was thrust into the hollow of the rock, merging with the body of the *waddan* painted there'.[597] Through this scene of sacrifice and transformation, Asūf's death then reveals a prophecy on the rock, bringing mythic rain to the desert:

> I, the High Priest of Matkhandoush, prophesy, for the generations to come, that redemption will be at hand when the sacred *waddan* bleeds and the blood issues from the stone, the earth will be cleansed and the deluge cover the desert.[598]

Simultaneously, this prophecy suggests redemption, purification, fertility and apocalypse, leaving the future of the desert and of humanity in question, and extending the spiritual and creaturely visions that conclude *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Min Makka ilā hunā*. As with hunting, the paradigm of sacrifice also shifts from celebration of community to relinquishment of self, and from a rite that, according to Susan Rasmussen, typically consolidates differences between human, animal and spirit in Tuareg societies, into one in which they merge.[599]

In many ways, the 'deluge' also culminates the simpler perceptions of unity glimpsed beneath the novel's mythic layers. As in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, one of Asūf's most powerful encounters with the w*addān* comes through companionship, hinting at a deeper unity:

> The herds came to him in the pastures, mixed with the goats. The males came right up to him and snuffled his clothes [...] At the start he'd been struck dumb, paralyzed with amazement. With time though, he'd grown used to them, and begun playing and speaking with them, recounting stories to them, telling them

[597] Ibid., 134.

[598] Ibid., 135.

[599] Susan Rasmussen, 'Animal Sacrifice and the Problem of Translation: The Construction of Meaning in Tuareg Sacrifice,' *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16, no. 2 (2002): 157.

> of his worries and problems: of the harshness of the desert, his fear of mixing with people. And they'd console him with those eyes of theirs, which conversed in a thousand languages, spoke with a thousand tongues, without ever making a sound.[600]

Mention of the *waddān's* mingling with the 'ordinary goats' of al-Kūnī's desert further emphasises notions of a creaturely unity beneath myth. As Casajus remarks, goats are far from prestigious in Tuareg society.[601] Representing Asūf's daily survival rather than his divine rescue, they are typically described as '*shaqī*' (unruly) in contrast to the '*shaqā*" (wretchedness) of the cornered *waddān*. Nevertheless, they are significantly also incorporated within the novel's ethics of response and self-sacrifice as, even when dying of starvation, Asūf refuses to eat them:

> He'd watch them die, not even moving to slaughter them; for, since what had happened there at the pit, he no longer butchered or ate meat [...] in the morning, he'd heap sand over the rotting corpses, with their bellies and entrails torn by the wolves, their eyes, so black and sad and beautiful before, eaten out by maggots.[602]

It is, perhaps, here where the 'absolute hospitality' of the novel is located, tying the most ordinary of animals into its spiritual message, beyond the vows and pacts that shape Asūf's relationship with the *waddān*. Furthermore, Asūf's refusal to eat the goats recalls the words of the gazelle in the novel's section of fable: '"Sacrifice," she went on, sadly and patiently, "knows nothing of bargains, and doesn't look to the soul for which the sacrifice is made. Sacrifice belongs to the Almighty Creator"'.[603] As in *Min Makka ilā*

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[600] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 79.
[601] Casajus, *La Tente*, 104.
[602] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 71.
[603] Ibid., 102.

hunā, the novel gravitates to a vision of God within, or, to use the words of Asūf's father, '"In the heart. With us, in us"'.[604] In both novels, this vision is perhaps most eloquently expressed through the shared human-animal gaze, through which, despite their contrasting approaches to myth, surprising parallels emerge between the authors' work. In many ways, these shared gazes carry a similar force to broader visions of apocalypse.

Creaturely Gazes

Alongside the disruptive quality of fable in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, animals' silence, as seen in the preceding sections, powerfully transforms human reality. In *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, in particular, this is further concentrated in shared human-animal gazes. Locking eyes with the rat, Mas'ūd concludes that 'they both belonged to the same world', while, through the turtle's gaze, he progressively surpasses the *fgi's* discourses and encounters *Allāh*. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, meanwhile, Cain's frustration with the gazelle's mysterious gaze is sharply contrasted to the comfort that Asūf derives from the mysteries of the *waddān* as they mingle with his herds.

In both novels, these shared moments, between animals and marginalised, antisocial humans, emerge through acts of hospitality that defy dominant political and moral systems. They are also built into allegorical frameworks, characterised by repetition of imagery and syntax. In *Min Makka ilā hunā*, Mas'ūd's silent 'observing' of others is one of the most prominent of these motifs, and, in *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, reference to the 'thousand languages' conveyed by the animal gaze, as well as its 'wretchedness', also feature prominently. Through such repetition, grounded in struggle and the physical encounter of creatures, both novels move from the social discourses imposed on

[604] Ibid., 58.

animals, and the political messages they convey within the narratives, to transformative encounters.

With these similarities in mind, the novels may also be read within a broader canon of literature, featuring similarly charged human-animal encounters. Helen MacDonald, for example, indicates the parallels between Herman Melville's (1819-1891) *Moby Dick* (1851), T. H. White's (1906-1964) *The Goshawk* (1951) and Ernest Hemingway's (1899-1961) *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).[605] For her, the encounters between humans and animals depicted in these novels represent a 'metaphysical battle', reaching back, as she puts it, 'to Puritan traditions of spiritual contest', in which 'salvation' represents 'a stake to be won in a contest against God'.[606] In *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, spirituality is certainly at stake, but both novels clearly move from imagery of struggle and conflict to that of unity.

Both al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī have also indicated Hemingway as a particular influence. Al-Nayhūm states that Mas'ūd was written 'in the spirit' (*bi-rūḥ*) of Hemingway, and that he carried *The Old Man and the Sea* in his pocket at all times.[607] Meanwhile, Elliot Colla, a translator of al-Kūnī's work, describes how the author, at one point, suggested reading *The Old Man and the Sea* as a way of enlightening his own work.[608] In a discussion with al-Nayhūm, al-Kūnī also quotes a statement from Hemingway about the writing of the novel:

> No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in [...] I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea

[605] Helen MacDonald, *H is for Hawk* (London: Vintage, 2015), 33.
[606] Ibid.
[607] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 28-29.
[608] Elliott Colla, 'Translating Ibrahim al-Koni,' *Banipal 40* (2011): 176.

> and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.[609]

In many ways, Hemingway's words convey the very spirit of the 'creaturely signs' that I have been exploring in Libyan fiction, moving between human and animal meaning. Unlike the majority of Hemingway's other work, *The Old Man and the Sea* has also been identified as moving beyond realism into mysticism, with one reader suggesting that, '*The Old Man and the Sea* is the story of the old man of the sea, the old man who *is* the sea'.[610] Both al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī similarly seem to have read mysticism in Hemingway's novel, emerging powerfully in their own interpretations of human-animal encounter.

Al-Kūnī, furthermore, has suggested that all great literature is inspired by the spirit of Sufism, and human-animal encounters arguably exemplify this spirit, hinting at fundamental 'glimmers of likeness' between species that open onto visions of unity. In his autobiography, al-Kūnī also explicitly draws al-Nayhūm into this perspective. Writing that al-Nayhūm's vision incorporates not only the 'oneness-of-being' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), but 'the oneness of all creatures within being' (*waḥdat al-kā'ināt fī hādha-l-wujūd*), he cites the following verse by Ibn al-'Arabī to describe him:

> My heart has become capable of every form: it is a
> pasture for gazelles, and a convent for Christian monks,
> And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and
> the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran.

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[609] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 39. The quote from Hemingway features in 'An American Storyteller,' *Time* 64, December 13, 1954.

[610] Eric Waggoner, 'Inside the Current: A Taoist Reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*,' in *Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea: Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, ed. Harold Bloom (Infobase Publishing: New York, 2008), 139.

I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's
camels take, that is my religion and my faith.[611]

Both *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar* may be interpreted through the heterotopic but unified vision of Ibn al-'Arabī's verse, with animals leading humans down unexpected paths. In both novels, as well as in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, '*arḍ Allāh*' is reinforced through extreme situations: the flood that obliterates Jandūba; the stormy bay in Sūsa; and the rock upon which Asūf is slaughtered. These visions accompany deeply ambivalent views of society, with heterotopias threatening to invalidate dominant space, and characters reduced to empty-handedness. At the heart of three of Libya's most significant novels, these striking visions of wilderness, creaturely vulnerability and divine encounter echo also through the writing of other authors. In those I examine next, broad visions of apocalypse, reaffirmations of *arḍ Allāh*, and themes of survival are condensed into the drama of individual animals' death, conveying a similar intensity and complexity to moments of silent human-animal gaze.

Mortal Creatures: Animal Deaths and Human Divisions

Animals' deaths, and the events leading to them, have recurred throughout my thesis, often representing an indictment of human society, but also leading characters to perceive fault lines within community and envision 'other worlds'. In survival novels, death is certainly never far from the picture, with meditations on nation and community encapsulated within humble, creaturely bodies. As human characters are confronted with animals' death, the ways in which they respond expose crucial moral dilemmas, echoing their response to the animal gaze. Underlying all is a fundamental apprehension of shared mortality, such as that evoked by Derrida:

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[611] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 58; Ibn al-'Arabī, *Tarjuman al-ashwāq: A Collection of Mystical Odes*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911), 67.

> Mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals, the mortality that belongs to the very finitude of life, to the experience of compassion, to the possibility of sharing the possibility of this nonpower, the possibility of this impossibility, the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish.[612]

In contrast to the talking jerboas, rats and gazelles of Chapter Three, *al-Ṭāḥūna* by al-Hindāwī, '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*' by al-Kiddī, and *al-Tābūt* by al-Ghazāl portray silent, domestic animals, in the form of a mule, a dog and a camel. In all, the complexities of society are imposed on these animals, although, unlike the novels discussed, they cannot argue back, nor are they fully anthopomorphised. Instead, their simple movement across *arḍ Allāh* breaks down the structures imposed upon it.

Again, my discussion focuses on conflicts concerning *rizq*, with animals' lives and deaths determined by issues of lack and plenty in human society, and raising questions of how much is enough, and how much is too much. In all three, intriguing variations on the theme of survival also emerge, and the predicaments depicted open onto broader contexts than those in Chapter Three. In *al-Ṭāḥūna*, the setting is an unnamed desert nation, in which power is located not in the hands of the local *fgi* and his turtles, but a centralised system of political oppression, located in the city, and operating through bulls. Al-Kiddī's short story '*Al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*', meanwhile, follows a dog from the village of Mārīsh across the Mediterranean to fame in the Netherlands, exploring rights and entitlement as he goes. Finally, *al-Tābūt* is set in the Aouzou Strip during the Libya-Chad War of the 1980s, and depicts the slaughter of a camel by a group of soldiers. All three address facets of Gaddafi's oppression, from pointless wars to abuse of rights and misuse of land. Al-Hindāwī's *al-Ṭāḥūna*, in

[612] Derrida, 'The Animal,' 396.

particular, was written in the 1980s, at the height of Gaddafi's tyranny, reflected in the iconography of power it constucts through animals.

Mighty Mule

From the first, *al-Ṭāḥūna* represents a nod to *Min Makka ilā hunā*, beginning with the word 'here' (*hunā*), isolated on a line of its own.[613] In his eulogy to al-Nayhūm, al-Hindāwī indeed labels *Min Makka ilā hunā* the most important of all Libyan novels, and recognises the older author as an important influence on his work.[614] As he writes, authors of his generation were all under his influence, whether 'conscious' or 'blind'.[615] After meeting in Benghazi at the end of the 1960s, al-Nayhūm also took a particular interest in al-Hindāwī, offering him work in Geneva, which he turned down to study in London in 1977. Beyond this brief period of study, al-Hindāwī is a largely self-educated author. Born in Benghazi, and growing up in al-Bayḍā', he left school before completing his secondary studies, and has worked his whole life in journalism, radio and literature. His first collection of short stories, *al-Judrān* (*The Walls*), was published in 1978, and he has since written several more collections, as well as novels. *Al-Ṭāḥūna* is his first and best known novel.

Set in a village 'between the desert and the sea', which is, in turn, located in a nation ruled by 'revolutionary thugs' (*al-ṣa'ālīk al-thawriyyūn*), *al-Ṭāḥūna* never explicitly mentions Libya, despite strongly evoking its distinctive historical, geographical and political contexts.[616] It is, furthermore, a novel of survival par excellence, depicting the lives of villagers, equally in thrall to the force of nature and injustice of rulers, with its three parts entitled 'The Call of Thirst' (*Nidā' al-ẓama'*), 'The Call of Death' (*Nidā' al-*

[613] Al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna*, 7.
[614] Al-Hindāwī, '*al-'Ā'id ilā Benghāzī*,' 38.
[615] Ibid.
[616] Al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna*, 76.

mawt) and 'The Call of Rain' (*Nidā' al-maṭar*).[617] Described as 'the novel of thirst in Arab life', indicating its searing approach to political oppression, parallels between it and *Min Makkā ilā hunā* emerge most clearly through the iconography of power constructed through juxtaposition of a solitary, suffering mule to a mass of bulls, signifying, both literally and allegorically, all that is corrupt in the country.[618]

Under the instructions of the sultan, the city *wālī* (governor) and the local *mukhtār* (mayor), the inhabitants of the remote village abandon agriculture and dedicate themselves to rearing these bulls for sale in the city, a use of land which barely maintains their survival. Echoing *Min Makka ilā hunā*, belief in the sanctity of the animals is deliberately fostered, and their rearing enveloped in official decrees and unjust systems of taxation, designed to keep the villagers in poverty so that they will not rebel: 'By force, the government maintained a way of life that would necessarily be lacking so that, without exception, the people would be wholly preoccupied with scraping together enough to live on (*tawfīr luqmat al-khubz bi-l-kād*)'.[619] Said to have become the 'symbol and slogan of the nation' (*ramz li-l-bilād wa-shi'ārahā*), the bulls allegorise both the rulers and their exploitative policies.[620] Specifically, they perhaps point to Gaddafi's misguided attempts to rear cattle in Kufra, one of his extravagant agricultural projects, and, more broadly, the ambivalent effects of oil on the country's sustainable development.[621] The novel's plot, meanwhile, is driven by inverting the bulls' symbolic power, shifting their traditional associations with fertility onto an aging mule.

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[617] Ibid., 5, 35, 97.

[618] See back cover of the 2004 edition.

[619] Al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna*, 76.

[620] Ibid., 77.

[621] Vandewalle, *History of Modern Libya*, 111.

After the breakdown of the village mill, a former point of communal cohesion, this mule, along with the old man who owns him, become the villagers' sole source of water, which they fetch from a distant spring. As the novel opens, however, the village *mukhtār* is depicted provoking the villagers against the 'water-carrier' (*al-warrād*), who has refused to continue his journeys due to the failing health of his mule. With the village cut off from the outside world, fear of death by dehydration provides the central drama. Like bulls, thirst represents the rulers' exploitative policies both allegorically and literally, as, after former foreign occupiers prove most concerned with digging for oil, and the new government fails even to repair the well, the villagers are placed at the mercy of a feeble animal.

Despite being central to the novel's plot, this mule is an understated narrative presence, paralleling how the villagers overlook his centrality to their survival:

> Even after years had elapsed, neither the people of the village, nor the *mukhtār* who ruled over it, had realised that their reliance on the old water-carrier every summer was subject to his reliance on his aging mule (*baghlahu al-kahl*).[622]

As Jill Bough observes, mules and donkeys have received little recognition for their central role in the rise of human civilisation.[623] *Al-Ṭāḥūna* overturns this. Although the mule is never focalised, or described in more than a few lines, the water-carrier is almost never depicted without reference to him caring for the animal, bringing him his scarce supply of water, or massaging his skin. The tenderness of their relationship contrasts the conflict that dominates the rest of the novel, and, like Mas'ūd and the rat, the water carrier identifies traits in the mule, which are lacking in humans, demanding: 'have you ever seen any creature more noble and faithful to the village

[622] Al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna*, 12.

[623] Jill Bough, *Donkey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 8-9.

people than this mule'.[624] Despite the fact that the village is on the brink of death, the water-carrier continues to think of the animal, his sole companion during the years of tyranny and poverty the village has suffered. Humbly describing himself, like Mas'ūd, as 'one of *Allāh's* creatures (*'ibād Allāh*) in the village', his condemnation of the villagers and their bull-rearing practices is centred on whether they would deign to carry the mule's body when he dies, declaring: 'I alone will bury this mule, carrying his body on the cart, the only time that I will ever pull him'.[625]

While the village's continued reliance on the animal is symbolic of its poverty, the mule, and his owner's loyalty to him, therefore also moves the novel beyond allegory into expressions of creaturely hospitality. The home of animal and man, filled with other outcast friends, forms a contestatory heterotopia, to which the *Mukhtār* and angry villagers are denied entry:

> No one could believe that the lord of the village, who entered any city door he pleased, including the *wālī's* palace, could find his way barred into a pitiful house, sheltering a mule, a dog, a lunatic, and an old man whose strength had been worn down by the trials of life.[626]

Bulls, meanwhile, become the domain where the water-carrier, like Mas'ūd, challenges power, announcing that he will not return to the spring until the *mukhtār* grants him a bull for doing so. The *mukhtār* agrees that, if he can subdue a bull from his pen, he may drive it to the spring, but warns him that, if defeated, he will be expelled from the village. In this way, as he faces the bulls, the water-carrier's act, like that of Mas'ūd, is one of rebellion, but also of self-sacrifice, as, in attempting to spare his mule another trip to the well, he is almost mauled to death.

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[624] Al-Hindāwī, *al-Ṭāḥūna*, 30-31.
[625] Ibid., 27.
[626] Ibid., 25-6.

Following his defeat, the novel's 'animal iconography' then moves into the symbolism of rain, as the villagers' longing for water is finally answered. Echoing al-Sayyāb's '*Unshūdat al-maṭar*', the words '*Maṭar... maṭar... maṭar*' are repeated, signifying apocalypse, redemption and renewal. As with the word '*hunā*', which begins the novel, they are also isolated from the main narrative.[627] Meanwhile, with the arrival of this longed-for rain comes both literal and allegorical revival, as the village Sheikh, one of the water-carrier's few allies, finally compels the villagers to expel the *mukhtār* and his bulls, declaring to him, 'It pains me to say that you see the world upside down. You taught us that, for eternity, the world has sat on the horn of a bull. This is the wisdom of the powerful (*ḥikmat al-aqwiyā'*)'.[628] Restoring the powerless, rain further fulfils his calls for the villagers to have faith in *Allāh*, returning them from their idolatry of bulls to a simpler faith, based in 'seeing *Allāh* in their five daily prayers'.[629] In a nightmare, meanwhile, the *mukhtār* sees the village restored, with the water-carrier recovered and his mule 'dancing joyfully'.[630]

This vibrant ending, while echoing aspects of *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, is both more straightforward and hopeful, with rain and a dancing mule representing not empty-handedness but social renewal. A powerful vision of the defeat of tyranny, it moves from the 'wisdom of the powerful' to a vision of *arḍ Allāh*, restored through rain, and the companionship of a man and mule. While understated, this mule, its illness and the possibility of its death, represent crucial elements of the water-carrier's call for justice and, in many ways, mirror the dog Ramaḍān, considered next. While being more central to the narrative than the mule, Ramaḍān remains a distanced

[627] Ibid., 109.
[628] Ibid., 101.
[629] Ibid., 109.
[630] Ibid., 103.

narrative presence, commenting on human fallacies and injustices through his simple physicality and movement across *arḍ Allāh*.

Pampered Pooch

Land, its division and ownership are central to '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*', along with issues of plenty, deprivation and rights. These, indeed, are the themes of much of 'Umar al-Kiddī's fiction and poetry, representing both elegies and laments to Libya's harsh geography, and bitter critique of its tyrannical rulers. Born in Gharyan in 1959, al-Kiddī first became a teacher of chemistry and biology, before turning to writing, both journalistic and literary. In the late 1980s, following Gaddafi's softening stance towards intellectual freedoms, he co-founded the literary supplement of *al-Jamāhiriyya* newspaper, and, in 1992, became editor of *al-Fuṣūl al-arba'a* (*The Four Seasons*), the magazine of the Libyan Writers' Union. However, after his first collection of poetry, *Aghānī Mārīsh* (*Songs of Marish*), was refused distribution by the authorities, al-Kiddī left Libya in 1999, and now lives in the Netherlands. In the past decades, he has continued to publish novels, short stories and poetry.

In his short story collection, *Ḥurrās al-jaḥīm* (2012; *Guards of Hell*), the politics of resource management in Libya are central, from issues of water, as seen in '*Jālib al-maṭar*', to the development of alfalfa.[631] So, too, are narratives of survival. In '*al-Ḥimār wa-l-juththa*' ('The Donkey and the Corpse'), for example, three friends journey home to the village of Mārīsh after the end of harvesting.[632] Attacked by poisonous snakes, struck by flooding, and forced to cross a field of landmines, they meet their fate one by one, with only their donkey reaching Mārīsh. Facing both the natural and manmade obstacles to survival in Libya, the three friends struggle onward, driven by faith in

[631] See '*Aḥlām mustaḥīla*' and following stories in *Ḥurrās al-jaḥīm* (Tripoli: Wizārāt al-Thaqāfah wa-l-Mujtama' al-Madanī, 2013), 59-71.
[632] 'Umar al-Kiddī, '*al-Ḥimār wa-l-juththa*,' in *Ḥurrās al-jaḥīm*, 151-57.

Allāh. As in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, evocations of His oneness and power become an almost rhythmic refrain.[633]

The donkey's miraculous survival, meanwhile, is echoed in '*al-Ḥayāt al-qaṣīra al-'ajība li-l-kalb Ramaḍān*',[634] which appears in the same collection, despite being earlier published in the Omani magazine *Nizwā* in 2010. Better termed a story of 'rags to riches' than a survival story, Ramaḍān's good fortune is at stake, and not his suffering. This shift in focus further accompanies a shift in geographical scope and historical setting. Rather than taking place in a remote patch of land, before Libya's Independence, '*al-Ḥayāt*' takes place in contemporary times, moving from the Libyan town of Mārīsh across the Mediterranean to Holland.

Beginning with Ramaḍān's birth in 1991, announced in official terms, and ending with his death, the story represents a biography of his life, with its title, as Marcia Lynx-Qualey observes, echoing Hemingway's 'The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber'.[635] The adjective 'happy' is, however, replaced with 'wonderful' (*'ajīb*), evoking the classical Arabic tradition of 'wonders' (*'ajā'ib*') discussed in my introduction, and becoming central to the main tensions within the story. Primarily, these tensions are concentrated in Ramaḍān's dual identity as both an unassuming creature, whose 'extraordinary' rise is a source of wonder and celebration, and a tool of satire, levelled at the Western whims through which it takes place.

The story opens with a description of Ramaḍān's early life as a guard dog, chained to a tree, before he escapes to become leader of a pack of strays, foraging for food on the outskirts of Mārīsh. In his struggle for survival, Ramaḍān represents an unambiguously positive character. Battling human traffic and protecting his pack, he echoes the

[633] Ibid., 152, 153, 155.
[634] Hence, '*al-Ḥayāt*'.
[635] Lynx-Qualey, 'The Animals in Libyan Fiction,' *Arablit*, May 8, 2011.

subsistence and struggle of the jerboa, rat and gazelle 'nations' examined so far. This simple existence is, however, starkly contrasted to what follows. On one fateful night, Ramaḍān squeezes through the bars of a Dutch irrigation project in search of water. Mrs de Vries, the wife of an engineer, takes pity on him, and the process of his domestication begins: 'Time passed and he became ever more at ease with her, until he took to sitting down after he had supped and listening to the strange words with which she wooed him'.[636] Soon, his domestication is complete:

> He developed the habit of accompanying Mrs de Vries to the office and sleeping beneath the desk while she drew up letters on the computer, just as he would tag along with her and her husband when they went out in the Volkswagen Golf.[637]

This budding companionship is initially depicted as a simple bond of fellowship. As the narrative progresses, however, it becomes more complicated. When her stay in Libya ends, Mrs de Vries resolves to smuggle Ramaḍān to Europe on an illegal Meditteranean crossing. Once in Holland, she then seeks asylum for him. Soon, his story spreads through the country and he becomes the wildly popular figurehead of the 'Animal Welfare Party' (*al-Ḥizb min ajl al-ḥayawānāt*), campaigning to enter parliament. After being granted permanent Dutch citizenship, he continues to enjoy fame until his publicly televised death and state funeral, concluding the narrative of his 'wonderful' life.

In moving from the initial drama of survival to companionship and then fame, '*al-Ḥayāt*' shifts between creaturely struggle, hospitality and satire, concerning the disparities between East and West. As with *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, it is undoubtedly possible to

[636] Al-Kiddī, '*Short Happy Life*,' 52.
[637] Ibid., 54.

interpret Ramaḍān as an allegory for human displacement and exile. While Sakr suggests that *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* prophetically echoes Gaddafi's rhetoric of 'rats' and 'cockroaches' during the 2011 uprising, Ramaḍān arguably refers directly to his 'stray dog' (*kilāb ḍāllā*) campaign, which involved rounding up, imprisoning and assassinating dissidents who fled.[638] However, Ramaḍān's astonishing rise to fame, and warm acceptance by the Dutch people, hardly represent recognisable human experiences, complicating a purely allegorical interpretation. More explicitly, the story juxtaposes issues of human and animal rights, as when a Libyan clerk describes to Mrs de Vries the chances of Ramaḍān being granted a passport:

> There are many people in this country who don't even have passports, not to mention those who've had theirs confiscated or who have been banned from leaving [...] Madam, I appreciate the nobility of your intentions (*nubl maqṣidik*) but we are currently at a stage in our history when we're starting to wake up to human rights, and they are still some way off. It is impossible to even contemplate the idea of animal rights at the moment.[639]

Described waging a 'small battle' (*ma'raka ṣaghīra*) with the local authorities, Mrs de Vries' noble intentions becomes increasingly problematic.[640] As Ramaḍān embarks on his 'wonderful' journey, the suffering of people fade behind him, including that of both Libyans and migrants. After paying over one thousand dollars for his voyage to Europe, Mrs de Vries sits on the shore of Lampedusa for five days, looking at photos of him, weeping, and forgetting to eat. Her tears are then paralleled in Holland where she gives talks about 'animals in the Third World', causing her audience to break into exaggerated sobbing. The human refugees on Ramaḍān's boat are, meanwhile,

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[638] Sakr, *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings*, 52.
[639] Al-Kiddī, 'Short Happy Life,' 54-55; '*al-Ḥayāṭ*,' 219.
[640] Al-Kiddī, '*al-Ḥayāt*,' 222.

mentioned only through the cursory description of her audience being fascinated by 'the circumstances of his departure in a boat full of Africans across the Mediterranean'.[641] When visiting Libya to make a biopic of his life, the film crew is also strictly forbidden from filming anything not directly relevant to him, and must take great pains in 'keeping the inhabitants of Marish away from the location where they were filming' (*ib'ād sukkān al-qarya min makān al-taṣwīr*).[642]

While Ramaḍān's adventure undoubtedly arises from Mrs de Vries' affection, and may even be interpreted through Derrida's concept of 'absolute hospitality', offered without any demand of reciprocity, it is, at the same time, deeply entangled in politics. Most importantly, it is contingent on his transformation into a legend consumable by the Dutch public, and revealing their deafness to broader human suffering. Presented on television with an orange scarf around his neck, and with a toy manufactured to look like him, and a series of comics dedicated to him, Ramaḍān transforms from a 'sign' of creaturely struggle into a consumable product. Even his name, Ramaḍān, conferred on him by Mrs de Vries, reduces the broader context of his homeland, its religious festivals and political struggles, to an empty cipher, stripped of the complex realities behind them. Significantly, he is, in fact, the only animal that I have explored to be given a name. When the story was later republished in *Ḥurrās al-jaḥīm*, he was also renamed Septimius, after the Roman Emperor Septimius Severus (145-211) who was born in Leptis Magna in modern-day Libya, ruled from 193-211, and was an important symbol of opposition to Gaddafi.[643]

It is, however, Ramaḍān's death, which most aptly encapsulates the tensions within the story. At his funeral, throngs of people walk behind his coffin, and a statue of him is

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[641] Ibid., 57.

[642] Al-Kiddī, 'Short Happy Life,' 58; '*al-Ḥayāṭ*,' 223.

[643] See my Afterword for further discussion of Septimius Severus.

erected in Amsterdam, with an orange scarf around its neck, completing his transformation into national hero. At the same time, he is referred to, for the first time, as a 'Libyan dog', and buried in a Protestant grave in The Hague, where Mrs de Vries and her husband are also later interred.[644] The satirical vision of his idolisation by the Dutch public is thereby juxtaposed to the simple creaturely companionship he shared with the de Vries, transcending religion and nation. Indeed, in his final moments, captured on film, he is depicted licking Mrs de Vries' face affectionately.

His statue, meanwhile, is described as 'surveying this fleeting world (*hādhihī al-dunyā al-fāniyya*) with a gaze unflustered and confident (*bi-istirkhā' wa-thiqa*), as if to say that he had achieved all he wanted in his fourteen years'.[645] This 'unflustered' gaze conveys a similar paradigm-shifting force to the other animal gazes discussed so far. As Marcia Lynx-Qualey remarks, there is something persistently 'doggish' about Ramaḍān.[646] On one level, this is simply conveyed by his repeatedly described 'distinctive, gruff bark' (*nubāḥahu al-ajash al-mumayyiz*).[647] On a deeper level, however, it emerges through the distance he maintains from the human drama around him, in spite of how fully his life is dictated by it. Ramaḍān, 'unflustered' and 'confident', is, primarily, driven by desires for food, water and companionship.

As in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, the story therefore represents two stories, one concerning the simple, unassuming life of the dog, and the other the wider forces which he traverses in all their excesses, injustices and hypocrisies. One of the rare characters in Libyan fiction to live and die 'happily ever after', he is both a tool of satire, mocking Western whims, and a creature, escaping Gaddafi's regime and a life of hardship. The complexity of his portrayal is also mirrored in wider Libyan fiction, where dog stories

[644] Al-Kiddī, 'Short Happy Life,' 59.
[645] Ibid; '*al-Ḥayāt*,' 223.
[646] Lynx-Qualey, 'The Animals in Libyan Fiction,' *Arablit*, May 8, 2011.
[647] Al-Kiddī, 'Short Happy Life,' 50; '*al-Ḥayāt*,' 221.

often represent a means of addressing the concept of rights between East and West. In Yusūf al-Sharīf's '*Qiṣṣat kalb ḥaqīqiyya*' ('The True Story of a Dog'), for example, a man buys a foreign guard dog, which arrives with a birth certificate and list of measures that must be taken to 'respect his rights'.[648] Realising he cannot possibly satisfy these measures, the man chains the dog outside, and it dies after deliberately twisting the chain around its neck. In al-Faqīh's '*Kilāb lā ta'aḍḍ*' (2009; 'Dogs that don't Bite'), meanwhile, a homeless migrant in London attempts to provoke a rich owner's dog into biting him so he can sue for compensation.[649] Failing in his attempts, largely due to the docility of the dogs in Hyde Park, he returns to his country, 'Saharastan', where, in desperation, he throws himself to the rabid stray dogs that surround the airport, and is mauled to death. Both allegorical and literal, the stories raise issues of the desperation provoked, in humans and animals alike, through lack of rights, freedom and opportunities.

Alongside such cross-cultural explorations, Libyan fiction is also simply filled with affectionate human-dog relationships, defying stereotypes of the negative treatment of canines in Muslim societies.[650] In author 'Abdullāh al-Quwayrī's (1930-1992) '*Kalbī al-ṣaghīr*' (1967; 'My Little Dog'), for example, a young boy searches for his puppy in the aftermath of an air-raid. Finding it dead, he causes his stern father to break into tears.[651] In al-Kūnī's *al-Wāḥa*, meanwhile, a Sheikh adopts a stray dog, despite the rest

[648] Yusūf al-Sharīf, '*Qiṣṣat kalb ḥaqīqiyya*,' *Scribd*, accessed May 12, 2016, https://www.scribd.com/doc/152946762/قصة-كلب-حقيقية

[649] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*Kilāb lā ta'aḍḍ*,' in *Fi Hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-bahā'im wa-l-ḥasharāt*, 59-75 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009).

[650] For discussion of attitudes to dogs, see: Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition*, 129-151.

[651] 'Abdallāh al-Quwayrī, '*Kalbī al-ṣaghīr*,' in *al-Zayt wa-l-Tamr*, 41-51 (Tunis: Dār al-Maghrib al-'Arabī, 1967).

of his tribe's disdain, announcing that, 'custom dictates we must protect all who seek refuge in our homes, even if that refugee (*al-lāji'*) is a dog'.[652]

This positive portrayal of dogs more broadly represents how hierarchies are reversed in Libyan fiction, and how creaturely attention and hospitality, regardless of species or status, transcend moral and political complexities. Ramaḍān represents a particularly nuanced version of this, revealing the difficulties involved with notions of hospitality in the modern world, while also remaining, like most Libyan animals, an unambiguously positive presence. In my final analysis, meanwhile, I return to the mythic and spiritual, through the death of a she-camel, and its cosmic consequences, drawing the plot of 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl's *al-Tābūt* into a powerful vision of *arḍ Allāh*.

Cosmic Camel

While '*al-Ḥayāt*' represents a story of 'rags to riches', 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl's first novel, *al-Tābūt*, may be termed one of 'psychological survival'. Concerning the Libya-Chad War between 1978 and 1987, fought over the uranium-rich Aouzou strip, not a single battle takes place during the five months the soldiers are stationed in their remote desert barracks. While food is delivered to them weekly, however, their inability to cope with boredom, isolation and the fear of attack leads them to imagine the need to fight for their lives, resulting in both their own deaths, and the slaughter of desert animals. A war novel without a battle, the narrative's pivotal moment comes in the penultimate chapter, titled '*al-Nāqa*' ('The She-Camel'), in which frustration and suffering are levelled against an animal. While the barracks, bringing soldiers together from across Libya, serves as a heterotopic setting for exploring the psychological damage of Gaddafi's needless and extravagant war, this exploration reaches its most

[652] Al-Kūnī, *al-Wāḥa*, 171.

intense in the she-camel's death, leading to a powerful vision of social disintegration on mythic, mystical and psychological levels.

Like the mule in *al-Ṭāḥūna*, the camel only appears briefly. Despite this, she is central to the novel's conclusion, leading, as in so much of al-Ghazāl's work, to visions of apocalypse, spiritual revelation and mental breakdown. Events begin as three soldiers, Zaydān, Jum'a and Bashīr, embark on a reconnaissance mission. After a tedious day, they perceive the she-camel, emerging alone from the wilderness: 'Suddenly, there was movement. Something was moving slowly through the silent valley. Like a phantom (*khayāl*) blending into the surrounding rocks it proceeded in large, slow paces (*yadibbu dabīban ḍakhman ṣāmitan*)'.[653] Through description of the camel's movement as '*dabīb*', from the same root as *dābba* (beast), and her likening to a 'phantom', she represents both a creaturely and mythical presence. Both dimensions are similarly central to her death.

Jum'a, an inherently violent soldier, longing for action, and depicted trampling lizards and shooting birds, determines to kill her. Meanwhile, Zaydān, a devout farmer, represents his foil, deriving wisdom from the flight of birds and traces left by lizards. Interpreting the camel as a divine warning (*nadhīr*), he urges Jum'a to leave her.[654] Heedless, Jum'a shoots her down anyway, overcome by 'an instinct to taste meat' (*gharīzat akl al-laḥm*), as well as a desire to prove his virility to the other soldiers.[655] Justifying his act as a necessary measure to feed the camp, and wage a 'war on death' (*al-ḥarb ma'a al-mawt*), he echoes the language of battles central to *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, *Min Makka ilā hunā* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*.[656] His notion of a 'war on death' is, however, pure fantasy, as Zaydān later reflects: 'Jum'a's claims about their hunger were untrue. They

[653] Al-Ghazāl, *al-Tābūt*, 241.
[654] Ibid., 242.
[655] Ibid., 244.
[656] Ibid.

had never been hungry'.[657] Jum'a's justifications of his violence are fundamentally misfounded, imposing his own desire for violence on the desert, as when he declares, 'The law of the desert dictates killing, warfare and bloodshed'.[658] The senselessness of his act is further compounded by the fact that, to reach the dead camel, the soldiers must navigate a field of landmines, described as a 'valley of death', representing a far greater threat to their survival than hunger.[659]

The camel's death, meanwhile, is described in detail, contrasting her initial, serene appearance: 'The back legs remained upright, with the hump raised high. The tail thumped weakly against her thighs and more droppings fell to the ground. Then the body collapsed and a pain-filled bellow wrenched the air (*kharaja al-raghghā' mu'liman*)'.[660] Following this, the animal's skinning is depicted in similarly gory detail, emphasising the vulnerability of her flesh through description of the 'layers of white' beneath her skin, 'interspersed with a web of red veins'.[661] After her butchery is complete, the soldiers return to the camp, and a feast is prepared.

Soon, however, the camel's meet turns black and hard, and her creaturely vulnerability is juxtaposed to the cosmic consequences of her death. Firstly, the smell of her roasted flesh hovers ominously over the campsite, while the narrator repeatedly announces that, 'all relationships with the desert had been spoilt by the she-camel's death' (*laqad fasadat al-'alāqa fī-l-ṣaḥrā' mundhu ḥādithat ṣayd al-nāqa*).[662] Jum'a, meanwhile, is killed by one of the many vipers which suddenly infest the camp, with his death directly linked to that of the camel:

[657] Ibid., 260.
[658] Ibid., 247.
[659] Ibid., 250.
[660] Ibid., 248.
[661] Ibid., 251.
[662] Ibid., 288.

> Jum'a died. He was slain by a little desert viper with a pointy tail. In the previous days, he had killed a whole array of them, as well as two foxes. Before that, his bullet had ripped apart the camel's throat and his blade had brutalised her skin and flesh.[663]

Continuing the mythic vision of the camel as *nadhīr* through Jum'a's death, the novel also moves into mysticism, as Zaydān gains spiritual insight through reflecting on her slaughter and consumption. His first meditations are grounded in the physicality of flesh: 'the camel had died, and here was her flesh, ready to pass through the soldiers' bodies and emerge as excrement, fertilised by fly eggs. Life was one huge whole, coursing mysteriously through the paths of existence'.[664] Following this, his visions move into more transcendent domains, moving from the camel's flesh to her gaze, witnessed in a trance:

> The she-camel halted and turned. Her huge eyes settled into the depths of his. Their gazes joined in a halo of light as a wail of lament flowed through him. He sensed his spirit melting into the light, and he was annihilated by it.[665]

Finally, the third soldier, Bashīr, suffers a nervous breakdown, overcome with grief over the camel's death, as she haunts him in his sleep, bellowing in the valley. Traumatised by the remnants of her meat in the camp, Bashīr insists on burying them, repeating the following words as he does so: 'Everything is dust and sand, everything is dust and sand' (*kull shay' turāb wa-rimāl*, *kull shay' turāb wa-rimāl*).[666] Ultimately, he resorts to suicide, running into a valley of landmines, unable to bear both his guilt, and overwhelming perception of creaturely mortality.

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[663] Ibid., 294.
[664] Ibid., 258-9.
[665] Ibid., 297.
[666] Ibid., 299.

Through the fate of Jum'a and Bashīr, the camel's death conjures up visions of sacrifice gone terribly wrong. Significantly, the chapter depicting her death also begins with a quotation from Qur'ān 7:73, narrating the wrongful slaughter of a she-camel by the people of Thamūd: 'here is the she-camel of God, a sign (*āya*) to you. Leave it to graze in the land of God (*fī arḍ Allāh*) and do it no harm, or else painful torment will befall you'.[667] Commenting on this verse, Stetkevych observes how, 'The she-camel here functions as a symbol of fecundity and prosperity, a sign of divine blessing whose improper or forbidden sacrifice marks the disintegration, indeed, extermination, of the polity'.[668] In *al-Tābūt*, the camel's death, through myth and mysticism, dramatises such disintegration, caused by lack of connections between humans and the earth, and restored only by returning, like Zaydān, to the most fundamental reflection on creaturely and spiritual wholeness.

Wider political contexts are also drawn into the camel's death, all concerning the destruction of *arḍ Allāh* and the unnecessary battles waged on it. Included in these contexts are World War Two, lingering in the form of deadly landmines, and, most prominently, the Libya-Chad War, driven by Gaddafi's expansionist dreams, and in which 10,000 Libyans were killed before the country's humiliating defeat.[669] Finally, there is the oil industry, evoked as the novel's main narrator, preparing for conscription, recalls his father returning from the desert where he worked for an oil company, and bringing wind-up toy animals with him. [670] These shiny toys, leading the child to imagine the desert as a rich, gleaming city, starkly contrast his later experience of the actual desert, its creatures and their suffering. As in all of al-Ghazāl's fiction, encounter with an animal opens onto metaphysical and organic visions of Sufi

[667] Trans. Tarif Khalidi.
[668] Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 28.
[669] Ahmida, 'Libya, Social Origins,' 77.
[670] Ibid., 38.

oneness, but also convey the destruction wrecked by both individual acts of violence and needless warfare.

Conclusion

Libya's modern history has been shaped by a complex web of political and economic forces, from the Italian colonisers portrayed in *Min Makka ilā Hunā* to the British and American military bases that provide background to *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* and *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, as well as the oil and irrigation companies in *al-Ṭāḥūna*, '*al-Ḥayāt*' and *al-Tābūt*. Transcending all, Libyan survival narratives are based in *arḍ Allāh*, a holistic unity, both creaturely and spiritual, which emerges through hybrid use of realism, symbolism and spirituality. Within this 'land', animals, similarly fluctuating between the 'real', symbolic and spiritual, are central actants, dramatising vulnerability, struggle and hospitality. In many ways, they recall a time before destruction and division, and explore the human traits that have caused them, questioning humanity's ability to deal with plenty without turning to greed and oppression. Through this process, the fiction may be described as 'anti-cartographic', critiquing notions of borders and possessions. This fundamental critique is also the subject of my final Part Three, in which heterotopic worlds move to former worlds, and humanity's evolution is assessed through both its animal 'other' and animal 'self', as well as the unity that once characterised it. Following visions of rite-of-passage manqué, discussed in Part One, and subsistence survival in Part Two, return to a time before divisions represents a final wistful expression of longing for lost and forgotten 'other worlds', as well as dramatising humanity's failure to create harmony in reality.

Part 3 – Origins: Human Forgetfulness and Animal Reminders

'*Among His wonders (āyāt) is that He created you from clay (turāb) and behold, you are human beings pervading the earth (basharun tantashirūn)*'.[671]

Alongside the spatial impulse in modern Arabic literature is a marked historical turn, with authors looking to the histories of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and drawing on classical Islamic heritage. This impulse celebrates the history of the modern nation-state, and seeks to legitimise its borders, 'saturating the novel's textual landscape with a profound longing for the past'.[672] At the same time, it strives for a future 'that has yet to take proper and desirable shape'.[673] Drawing the themes and lessons of history into the present, it further evokes past instances of injustice and violence in order to point to the authoritarian nature of power in societies today, and envision a harmonious way forward for them.[674]

Libyan fiction is no exception. Well-known authors such as 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī (b. 1926) and Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Qamūdī (dates unknown) have, for example, written historical novels concerning prominent resistance fighters from Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica, battling Ottoman, French and Italian rule.[675] Others go further back. Taking place in the 5th century BCE, 'Alī Khushaym's (1936-2011) *Īnārū* (1998; *Inaru*) depicts tribes from the lands of modern-day Egypt and Libya, uniting to battle Persian

[671] Qur'ān 30:20, trans. Tarif Khalidi.
[672] Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia*, vi.
[673] Ibid.
[674] Allen, 'Rewriting Literary History,' 256.
[675] See, for example: 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, *Ghūma: fāris al-ṣaḥrā'* (Tripoli: Dār al-Fikr, 1973); and Muḥammad al-Qamūdī, *Ramaḍān al-Suwayḥilī: riwāya tārīkhiyya* (Tripoli: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Fikr, 1971).

forces.[676] The work of all three may certainly be interpreted as a process of recovering, rewriting and legitimising Libyan history, exploring its relationship with fellow Arab nations, and the structures of power that have ruled over it.

Both al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm and Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī have similarly pointed to the importance of rethinking the country and region's history. Al-Nayhūm, for example, states that his encyclopaedia of Libyan history, *Tārīkhunā* (1976; *Our History*), was designed to rectify existing misrepresentations driven by imperialist agendas and colonial mentalities.[677] Al-Kūnī, meanwhile, has accused Gaddafi of deliberately eradicating the history of Libya for the purpose of aggrandizing his own regime.[678] Describing the country as 'the oldest of all nations', and the 'cornerstone and lost foundation of the four founding cultures: Egyptian, Babylonian, Hellenic and Libyan', his fiction is driven by a desire to assert its significance within the world's major epistemological traditions.[679]

At the same time, as seen in Part Two, many novels focus not on heroic landmarks on the route to nationhood, nor the authority of heritage, but struggles for survival. Lingering on the material remnants of war and violence, these novels open onto creaturely perspectives, in which straightforward notions of national belonging are problematised. In this part, I focus on a similarly disruptive kind of history, in which recent contexts are placed into dizzyingly distant perspectives, comprising evolutionary imaginings, interwoven with mythic paradigms of creation and fall. Returning to humanity's humble origins, I examine what might be termed a 'deep historic impulse' in Libyan fiction, rethinking the country's long experience of imperialism through the vast swathes of time predating human civilisation and even 'humanity' itself. Just as the subsistence of Libyan literature, examined in Part Two,

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[676] 'Alī Fahmī Khushaym, *Īnārū* (Casablanca: Markaz al-Ḥaḍāra al-'Arabiyya, 1998).
[677] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 4. Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Tarīkhunā: 1-7* (Geneva: Dār al-Turāth, 1976).
[678] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 455
[679] Ibid.

starkly contrasts the agricultural plenty of modern Egyptian fiction, so, too, does this endless stretch of time parallel more concrete historical turns, based in the glories of civilisations past.

It goes without saying that animals feature prominently in Libyan deep historical imaginings, as both the 'other' that has accompanied humanity during its long evolution, and the 'self' that it once was, and still is. With their pasts entangled in that of humanity, animals become narrators, protagonists and even historians, defamiliarizing human histories. Among the themes they raise are: the shared origins of all lifeforms; the notion of a lost harmony; the concept of a land's 'original' inhabitants; and the roots of human imperialism, leading to dispossession and decline. Above all, these themes circle around notions of violence and alienation, both within the human species and between it and its fellow creatures, expressing what Stefan Sperl, commenting on Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's work, terms 'pessimism and ontological doubt in the validity and viability of human civilisation as a whole'.[680]

Qur'ān 15:26, which heads this part, captures both my focus on origins, ('He created you from clay'), and 'civilising', ('you are human beings pervading the earth'). Also containing the term *āyāt* (signs), the verse reflects how, in Libyan fiction, humans' material origins represent another sign of shared creaturely origins, seen in contrast to the violence of their 'pervasion'. As Tlili remarks, the Qur'ān often emphasises the humbleness of humans' origins, from clay, and even a 'despised fluid' (*mā' muhīn*, 32:8).[681] In contrast to these origins, it also emphasises their ungratefulness and arrogance. Even their assumption of responsibility over nature, conveyed by the concept of 'trust' (*āmāna*, 33:72), is presented in an ambivalent light, leading to their

[680] Sperl, '"The Lunar Eclipse",' 253.
[681] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 242.

description as 'unjust' (*ẓalūm*) and 'intemperate' (*jahūl*).[682] In Libyan fiction, humans' 'ascent' over nature is similarly ambivalent, often expressed as 'trickey' (*ḥīla*), and portrayed through moments of primordial fall, or failure to assume responsibility for what separates them from animals.

Clearly, such unromanticised views of human origins and history are suggestive of political allegory, with Gaddafi identifiable in every portrait of founding fratricide, and historical cycles of violence pointing inevitably to the *Jamāhiriyya*. Beyond Libya and, indeed, nation, however, fractures are created in notions of progress more broadly, moving beyond founding fathers to the animals that precede them, and focusing on humanity's messy dispersal as well as its shared origins. Exploring these perspectives, I draw on Anat Pick's concept of 'creaturely history', which she develops through Walter Benjamin's 'natural history' (*Naturgeschichte*).[683] Reorienting dominant perspectives, such a history evokes the 'fragmented and catastrophic past', replacing the 'agent' who 'makes history' with the 'creature overtaken by or lost in history'. [684] It also, as Pick puts it, 'reabsorbs the human in nature and paves the way for radically other histories inclusive of nonhuman life'.[685] Applying this approach, Pick examines William Golding's (1911-1993) novel, *The Inheritors* (1955), concerning the last of the Neanderthals, indicating how it raises both postcolonial and ecocritical themes within a tale of humanity's earliest conquests.[686] My focus is similar, looking at how Libyan fiction explores contemporary contexts through both the deep historical human condition, and the centuries of imperialism that have succeeded it.

[682] Ibid., 240-242.
[683] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 71-76.
[684] Ibid., 73-4.
[685] Ibid., 74.
[686] Ibid., 54.

Histories and Deep Histories: Animal Selves and the Rise of Civilisation

Since the first millennium BCE, the land of modern-day Libya has experienced an almost uninterrupted stream of foreign rulers, with the desert's Berber tribes, the land's longest known inhabitants, seeing the arrival and departure of Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Muslims, Ottomans and Italians. As Anthony Thwaite puts it 'In Libya you are made aware the whole time of the abandonment of things, the material leftovers of receding cultures'.[687] These material leftovers, stretching back to desert cave art from 10,000 BCE, also linger in the writing of modern Libyan authors, woven into human passions and creaturely vulnerability, and creating fractures within monolithic histories of the rise and fall of civilisations. In his essay 'Dans les sables Libyens' (2011; 'The Sands of Libya'), Kamal Ben Hameda portrays the ghosts of soldiers past, and the whisper of defunct ideologies, echoing through the nation's ruins:

> Que d'amours coupables, de haines inavouées, d'entichements extatiques ont miné les splendeurs défuntes de Cyrène, de Sabratha, de Leptis Magna! Ces vestiges comme nostalgiques du temps de leur gloire où rôdent toujours les silhouettes de combattants épuisés, où de nouvelles cohortes ne cessent de lever les étendards de l'absurde.[688]

Behind visions of 'splendeurs défuntes' and 'étendards de l'absurde', authors also move further into the distant, fractured and defamiliarizing animal past. With almost no 'material leftovers' remaining of this time, it allows for yet more creative imaginings and rewritings.

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[687] Anthony Thwaite, *The Desert of Hesperides: An Experience of Libya* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1969), 162.

[688] Ben Hameda, 'Dans les sables Libyens,' 48.

Within many academic disciplines, the concept of 'deep time', 'deep history' or the 'deep past' has, as Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail point out, been largely neglected.[689] Despite the tremendous revolution in human understanding brought by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the paradigms of 'sacred history', locating a fixed origin in the Garden of Eden, have tended to migrate into modern secular historiography, asserting a past point from which to explore the 'ascent' of man, civilisation and nation.[690] Against such tendencies, Smail argues that we should open investigations into what has been termed humanity's 'speechless past', challenging notions that this past is inaccessible and that the history of humanity concerns nations rather than 'rootless bands'.[691] While Smail does not mention the role of literature in this process, he and Shryock do flag the centrality of imagination, and of reconfiguring 'the level at which a story can be imagined' and reconceiving 'the human condition as a hominin one'.[692] Others have explicitly incorporated the possibilities of art into this process:

> Since the majority of deep time predates human existence, the concept lies not only beyond our individual experience but beyond the experience of the entire human race. Yet we yearn to find ways to comprehend it and this desire provides ground for artists to investigate. Understanding deep time lies, perhaps, in a combination of the rational and the intuitive.[693]

In Libyan fiction, there is no reluctance to engage with humanity's deep past, dwelling on its ignominy, exploring how it arrived where it is today, and questioning whether this place is to be celebrated. Above all, deep history emerges as a literary domain, or

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[689] Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, introduction to *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, ed. Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 8.
[690] Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 14.
[691] Ibid., 4, 44.
[692] Shryock and Smail, introduction to *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, 15.
[693] JD Talasek, *Imagining Deep Time* (Washington DC: National Academy of Sciences, 2014), 2.

'other world', providing greater freedom from historically-rooted ideologies. While authors undoubtedly read their own visions into this past, their driving concern is to challenge dominant paradigms. Combining the rational with the intuitive, their deep historical imaginings are often also bound up in mythic paradigms, with different narrative strands challenging and informing the other, and with 'sacred history' upset by animal voices.

Origin Myths and the Search for What Once Was

Broadly defined, 'myth' is a cosmological account of origins, explaining the roots of natural and cultural phenomena and the relationships between them. As Chris Baldick observes, readings of myth are also divided into 'rationalist' and 'romantic' understandings.[694] The first considers it 'a false or unreliable story or belief', propagating arbitrary social practices.[695] The latter, meanwhile, identifies it as 'a superior intuitive mode of cosmic understanding', offering alternative ways of imagining relationships between the world's entities.[696] In Libyan fiction, this roughly reflects distinctions between the epistemologies of al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī, with the former decrying fallacious beliefs unfounded in logic, and the latter infusing his work with mythic paradigms.

In the authors' approach to narratives of creation and fall, however, intriguing points of comparison emerge, with both striving towards alternative readings of myth through visions of the historical and deep historical. Al-Nayhūm, for example devotes much attention to symbolic analyses of the Qur'ān, which he weaves into discussions of evolution, while al-Kūnī combines creation myths with exploration of the deep history of Saharan peoples, exploring humanity's roots and historical dispersal. Such

[694] Baldick, *Literary Terms*, 217.
[695] Ibid.
[696] Ibid.

combinations of myth, history and deep history are also reflected in broader Libyan fiction, with authors utilising myth as an 'intuitive mode of cosmic understanding', while also rewriting it with deep, creaturely history at its heart. In this way they disrupt familiar visions of 'sacred history', echoing the words of Donna Haraway: 'Destabilising an origin story is perhaps more powerful in the deconstruction of the history of man than replacing it with a more progressive successor'.[697]

While casting unflinching light on historical violence, however, many authors are also united in a tendency to wistful imaginings of a past, utopic 'other world', inhabited by humans in a profounder state of harmony with one another and with nature. This tendency reflects what Mikhail Bakhtin terms 'historical inversion', locating 'such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the *past*'.[698] It also reflects what Ouyang terms a 'politics of nostalgia' in modern Arabic fiction, yet also one that extends into a time where the majority of history is either excluded, or yet to happen.[699] Above all, nostalgic 'other worlds' hark back to a time of human and creaturely unity, unmarked by nation, and where divisions, between male and female, human and animal, were more fluid, offering wistful visions of what humanity has failed to become, as well as what it has forgotten. Implicit within many of these imaginings is the Sufi concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness-of-being), offering a vision of a deep spiritual harmony through which social, political and environmental injustice is critiqued.

All of the fiction discussed is set in modern times, and reflects back on deep history in different manners. In contrast to Part Two, where confrontational, and often physical,

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[697] Donna Haraway, 'Primatology is Politics by Other Means,' *Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 2 (1984): 491.

[698] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 147.

[699] Ouyang, *Politics of Nostalgia*, vi.

human-animal encounters were examined, I focus on distanced observation, in which humans regard animals and animals regard humans, and, in the judgement that ensues, the origins of modern violence and alienation are located. As in Parts One and Two, al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī provide a comparative focus to my analyses. Chapter Five considers the encounter of human and primate in al-Nayhūm's dystopian evolutionary fable *al-Qurūd* (1984; *The Primates*). Marking a significant shift in his writing, the fable bears all the weight of his disillusionment with Gaddafi's oppressive regime, leading to a despairing vision of humanity as a whole. Alongside *al-Qurūd*, I also consider other ape stories from authors of the sixties generation: 'Abdallāh al-Quwayrī (1930-1992), 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī (b. 1926) and Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh (b. 1942). In Chapter Six, I then focus on myth, firstly linking childhood to deep historical animal tales through returning to *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (2011; *Under the Tripoli Sky*, trans. Adriana Hunter) by Kamal Ben Hameda (b. 1954) and *Sarīb* (2000; *A Long Story*) by Aḥmad al-Faytūrī (b. 1955). I then continue my discussion through Najwā Bin Shatwān's (b. 1960) *Wabr al-aḥṣina* (2007; *The Horses' Hair*), and conclude through further analysis of al-Kūnī's *Nazīf al-ḥajar* (1989; *The Bleeding of the Stone*) as a rewriting of the Cain-Abel narrative.

Chapter 5 – The Ape Within, the Ape Without: Primate Fiction and the Blame Game

Franz Kafka's 1917 short story, 'A Report for an Academy', with its ape narrator, Red Peter, who has adopted the trappings of human culture, is a classic example of a trend in twentieth century literature, both fictional and nonfictional, that enters into dialogue with Charles Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution.[700] This trend seeks to explore the human and animal condition by juxtaposing humans to primates, exploring what unites and divides them, and ultimately recasting the 'human' condition as a 'hominid' one. Red Peter, for example, makes the following statement to the fictional academy he is addressing:

> [...] your life as apes, gentlemen, insofar as something of that kind lies behind you, cannot be farther removed from you than mine is from me. Yet everyone on earth feels a tickling at the heels: the small chimpanzee and the great Achilles alike.[701]

For Marian Scholtmeijer, this 'tickling at the heels' can be traced in all of what she terms 'post-Darwinian fiction', in which the theory of evolution represents a necessary and unavoidable subtext:

> In a post-Darwinian world, *all* stories are stories about apes told by other apes – or at least primates. Implicitly, all stories are about the struggle of a particular

[700] Franz Kafka, *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories*, trans. Nahum Norbert Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1971), 219-228.
[701] Ibid., 250.

> species of ape to invent and preserve a nonanimal identity for itself. Only a few writers consciously incorporate that struggle into the body of their texts.[702]

This chapter explores Libyan authors who have consciously incorporated the struggle into their texts, juxtaposing humans to apes in explicitly evolutionary perspectives. In one respect, these perspectives raise important epistemological concerns, representing an embrace of modern, secular and scientific modes of thought, and often a critique of the mentalities that oppose them. In Muḥammad al-Misallātī's (b. 1949) '*Inna al-arḍ tadūr*' (2006; 'The Earth Really Goes Round'), for example, a child is beaten by his family for repeating what his teacher tells him about humans being descended from monkeys.[703] His older brother then advises him that, in order to flatter their vanity, he should instead tell them they are descended from gazelles.

While epistemological concerns represent an important part of monkey stories in Libyan fiction, however, I focus on their ontological dimensions, examining how they probe the human condition. In each text, the author's focus on primates is immediately apparent, with the word '*qird*' (ape, monkey), or its plural, '*qurūd*', appearing in the title. Human and primate are then juxtaposed in different manners: through a scene of pursuit in 'Ali Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī's '*al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*' (1992; 'The Ape at the Airport'); scientific experiment in the guise of fable in al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm's *al-Qurūd* (1984; *The Primates*); momentary eye contact in Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's '*Al-Nisnās qabl al-ghurūb: Fī hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-qurūd*' (2009; 'Monkeys before Sunset: In Praise of Primates'); and point and counterpoint in 'Abdallāh al-Quwayrī's series of short stories,

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[702] Marian Scholtmeijer, 'What is "Human"? Metaphysics and Zoontology in Flaubert and Kafka,' in *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History*, ed. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior (Routledge: London, 1997), 7, 139.

[703] Muḥammad al-Misallātī, '*Inna al-arḍ tadūr*,' in *Tafāṣīl al-yawm al-'ādī*, 7-11 (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2006).

beginning with '*al-Qird taḥta al-shajara*' (1973; 'The Ape under the Tree').[704] While all are set in modern times, they function in the manner that Donna Haraway observes of primatology: 'a time machine in which the other is placed at the time of origins, even if the empirical field is in modern Rwanda or Kenya'.[705]

In addition to its evolutionary connotations, '*qird*' is also a common insult in Arabic, indicating stupidity and lack of manners, and far outstripping the harshness of the English 'monkey'. Part of my analysis will therefore explore whether authors emphasise the contemptibility of the term, or counter it, and, by extension, whether they attribute human flaws to the animals from which they have evolved or the human nature into which they have evolved. Differing in spirit from many of the encounters discussed so far, ape stories most clearly serve as an often satirical blame game, with the similarities between humans and apes becoming a means of mirroring and exploring the flaws and weaknesses of one in the form of the other. This, in turn, leads to more prominently political dimensions, as Ethan Chorin remarks of '*al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*': 'When reading [...] Ali Mustapha Misrati's lengthy piece about efforts to catch a monkey running amok in Tripoli airport, one begins to wonder whether the authors are laughing at their publishers, or their readers'.[706] Beginning with al-Miṣrātī's story, I briefly introduce the approach I will take in more sustained analyses of other authors, looking at how political critique and evolutionary exploration are integrated, seeking the roots of Gaddafi's brutality, and of human alienation, in hominid ancestors.

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[704] 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, '*Al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*,' in *al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*, 5-31 (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyyah li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1992); al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *al-Qurūd* (Benghazi: Maktabat al-Tumūr li-l-Kitāb, 2010); Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*Al-Nisnās qabl al-ghurūb: Fī hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-qurūd*,' in *Fi Hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-bahā'im wa-l-ḥasharāt*, 41-49 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009); 'Abdallāh al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qird taḥt al-shajara*' (and following stories), in *Khayṭ lam yansujhu 'ankabūt*, 38-104 (Libya: al-Dār al-'Arabiyyah li-l-Kitāb, 1981).

[705] Haraway, 'Primatology is Politics,' 496.

[706] Chorin, *Translating Libya*, 5.

The Missing Link: Humans Observed and Observing

Born in 1926 in Alexandria, after his family fled Italian occupation, al-Miṣrātī grew up in Egypt, graduating from al-Azhar University in 1946. Returning to Libya in the late 1940s, he joined the struggle for independence, becoming speaker for the National Conference Party. In the 1960s, he continued to work within politics as a Member of Parliament, forming an opposition front to the monarchical government. In the same decade, he also began to write, publishing numerous works on Libyan history and folklore, all of which articulate a sense of national pride, and desire to forge a cohesive identity.[707] In 1962, al-Miṣrātī also published his first collection of short stories and, to date, has over ten collections to his name. Like al-Nayhūm many of these are satirical, and based in Libyan social realities. As Saadun Ismail Sayeh comments, 'His characters are local, and so intimately familiar that you are likely to meet them, or run across them, in the streets of Tripoli, and its cafés'.[708] This does not, however, prevent al-Miṣrātī from also addressing broader ontological issues. As Sayeh further remarks, his satire is consistently directed 'at the human condition itself'.[709] Both levels are prominent within '*al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*', a particularly humorous and light-hearted take on humanity's monkey origins.

Set in Tripoli airport of the 1950s, the story depicts the pursuit of an escaped monkey by an airport worker, 'Ammī Faraj. The pursuit is introduced by a lengthy opening description of the airport, sharply divided between local workers and foreign travellers. The latter's colonial mentality is emphasised through description of them reading books on the 'customs of Ghadamis' and 'jungles of Africa', while also

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[707] See, for example, *al-Mujtama' al-lībī min khilāla amthālihi al-sha'biyya* (Tripoli: Dār Maktabat al-Fikr, 1972) and *Ghūma: fāris al-ṣaḥrā'* (Tripoli: Dār Maktabat al-Fikr, 1973).
[708] Saadun Ismail Sayeh, introduction to *The General in Victoria Station and other stories*, by 'Alī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, trans. Saadun Ismail Sayeh (New York: Global Humanities Press, 2003), 7.
[709] Ibid.

consulting diagrams of the Earth's inner layers in order to locate where 'precious metals' might be found.[710] For these businessmen, travellers and soldiers, Libya represents either a 'tray of sand' or 'barrel of oil'.[711] They are, meanwhile, served by a waiter, said to have seen 'three different flags' fly above the airport in the thirty years of his employment there.[712]

Into this scene of human division, a plane arrives from central Africa on its way to London, carrying, 'tourists, traders, spies and scientists', collectively described as a 'microcosm of the world' (*ṣūra muṣaghghara min al-'ālam al-kabīr*).[713] With them is a cage of monkeys, caught in various parts of Africa, and destined for laboratories and zoos in Europe. One of the monkeys, a rare breed believed to represent the 'missing link' (*al-ḥalqa al-mafqūda*) between humans and their primate ancestors, escapes, and 'Ammī Faraj's ensuing pursuit of the animal in the airport scaffolding occupies the rest of the story.[714]

Satirizing Libyan society and colonial mentalities, as well as the human species as a whole, the story is constructed around numerous levels of observation. Firstly, the local workers and foreign travellers are suddenly united in observing the thrilling pursuit of man and monkey above them. As they do so, they, too, become observed, with the story's omniscient narrator commenting on their collective behaviour as spectators. The word '*al-insān*' (the human) is used consistently, grouping them together as one species as they become subject to the judging commentary: 'this sudden shift of attention was nothing strange, for it is part and parcel of human nature (*al-ṭibā' al-bashariyya*)'; 'the human (*al-insān*) always claps for the winner and laughs at

[710] Al-Miṣrāti, '*al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*,' 9.
[711] Ibid.
[712] Ibid., 10.
[713] Ibid., 11.
[714] Ibid.

the loser'; and 'the human (*al-insān*) loves to be a spectator, or to participate solely from a distance or, in this case, from below'.[715]

Both the narrator's observation of the humans and the humans' observation of the pursuit are, meanwhile, juxtaposed to the more immediate encounter of monkey and man. A humorous vision of humanity's lost vigour, 'Ammī Faraj puffs and pants after the animal, which looks back 'sarcastically' (*bi-sukhriya*).[716] Representing an almost slapstick comedy, the scene aptly demonstrates al-Faqīh's appraisal of al-Miṣrātī: 'his humour is most evident in his caricature stories when he is closest to the art of a cartoonist'.[717] This time, al-Miṣrātī presents a caricature of humanity itself, its monkey origins and modern-day weaknesses: 'It was a strange sight – a human scrambling and a monkey darting about. If Darwin had seen it, he would have been certain he had found the "missing link"'.[718] Expanding on this notion of the 'missing link', the narrator continues to establish comparisons between man and monkey. In particular, the monkey is said to display early forms of the 'treachery' (*al-khidā'*) and 'cunning' (*al-makr*) specific to humankind.[719] A comparison is also drawn between the way in which both the monkey above and the spectators below observe the antics of 'Ammī Faraj:

> The monkey looked at him, as though in pity (*ishfāq*), or perhaps malicious pleasure (*shamāta*). A look can only be explained by a word and monkeys can't speak, even if they can cast glances of pity or malicious pleasure. Like the monkey, the spectators were also watching with pity and malicious pleasure, although they were also chattering loudly and chaotically.[720]

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[715] Ibid., 12, 21, 23.
[716] Ibid., 12.
[717] Al-Faqīh, *Libyan Short Story*, 172.
[718] Al-Miṣrātī, '*al-Qird fī-l-maṭār*,' 17-18.
[719] Ibid., 26.
[720] Ibid., 27.

Tearing though the airport and its hierarchies of race and class, the monkey thus unites the humans as one, primarily for the purpose of satirising them. A similar perspective is also created through description of the segregated travellers' children, playing harmoniously and demonstrating 'a childish innocence that served as a reminder of human unity (*waḥda insāniyya*), regardless of colour or class'.[721] Beneath its satire, the story hints at a more probing ontological enquiry, with children and monkey, combining playfulness and satire, serving as a reminder of unity lost. As Chorin observes, tacit reference to Gaddafi's regime may be gleaned within the story, but only within deeper layers of exploration into humanity, its drives and desires, and where they arose from. This perspective is also at the heart of the ape stories I examine next, which lead to far grimmer perspectives on human flaws, exemplified by al-Nayhūm's *al-Qurūd*, expressive of the author's profound disillusionment with Libya's deterioration into political tyranny.

A Primate Fable: Politics, Evolution and a Human Ideal

In the early 1970s, al-Nayhūm was involved in various ways with the new military regime, invited to lecture to the RCC (Revolutionary Command Council), and selected as a member of the founding committee of the Libyan Arab Socialist Union in 1971. While initially trying to exert an influence, however, he swiftly realised his inability to do so, leaving Libya for good in 1974, following Gaddafi's announcement of the Cultural Revolution in Zwara in 1973. As Taji-Farouki observes, al-Nayhūm seems to have reached a 'pragmatic compromise' with the regime, allowing him to visit the country occasionally.[722] Suspicions of his active involvement nevertheless persisted, and some even hypothesise that he contributed to the writing of the *Green Book*, and influenced the policies that emerged from it. Drawing on oral testimonies, however, Taji-Farouki

[721] Ibid., 10.

[722] Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 265.

suggests that there is little basis for such suppositions.[723] Summing up, she describes al-Nayhūm's relationship with the regime as follows:

> Sadiq can thus be seen, according to one view, as an intellectual who tried but failed to speak the truth to power. Refusing to become its servant, he was apparently compelled to embrace in profound disillusionment a difficult path that steered between exile, home and silence.[724]

Whatever the practical details of his 'compromise', al-Nayhūm's writing became infused with critique of dictatorial power and a profound sense of disappointment.[725] Both emerge vividly in the way that animals transform in his work, particularly in his two novellas, *al-Ḥayawānāt* (1975; *The Animals*) and *al-Qurūd* (1982; *The Primates*). The only fiction that al-Nayhūm published after *Min Makka ilā hunā*, they are, despite being animal fables, as different from the author's previous writing as they are similar to each other.[726] Firstly, their abstract and implicitly critical titles contrast the rootedness of *Min Makka ilā hunā* (1970; *From Mecca to Here*) and conversational tone of *Taḥiyya ṭayyiba wa-ba'd* (1972; *Greetings*). Secondly, Eid sheep and water rats are replaced by Ugandan baboons and jungle animals, with both novellas set far from the Libyan realities in which al-Nayhūm's early work had been rooted. Thirdly, the role of fable transforms, with dystopian jungles symbolic not of escape from society, but the dog-eat-dog world of tyranny, in which animals are burdened with all the worst aspects of humanity. Finally, the narrative perspective is distanced, and human characters

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[723] Ibid.

[724] Ibid., 244.

[725] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-thānī*, 46.

[726] The publication dates of these works seem to have become confused in different sources referring to them. Taji-Farouki and al-Kubtī suggest that *al-Qurūd* was published in 1975 by *Dār al-Ḥaqīqa*, with *al-Ḥayawānāt* following in 1984 (Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 257-58; al-Kubtī, ed., *Ṭuruq*, 347). The main evidence against these dates is a 1978 discussion between al-Nayhūm and other authors, in which *al-Ḥayawānāt* is discussed and *al-Qurūd* not mentioned (al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 31).

disappear almost altogether, expressive of al-Nayhūm's frustration and isolation as he reached out to a readership that no longer existed.

The political critique of both novellas is also so explicit that al-Nayhūm's lack of arrest seems inexplicable, with both their titles aligning them with George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), despite al-Nayhūm's denials of any connection.[727] In answering questions concerning the message of *al-Ḥayawānāt*, he insists that it concerns the human condition as a whole.[728] Undoubtedly, however, both it and *al-Qurūd* are, primarily, explorations of tyranny, with the latter, in particular, anchored in evolutionary imagery, and coming dangerously close to labelling Gaddafi a baboon.

Law of the Jungle

Set in the Budongo Forest in Uganda, *al-Qurūd* depicts a pack of baboons, monitored by a group of 'observers' (*murāqibūn*) conducting an experiment on them from a hut on a hill. Investigating whether the baboons, each one named after a famous military leader, can cooperate and employ rudimentary weapons, the observers release a cheetah among them. The novella then portrays the baboon leaders' internal struggles and inability to protect the weak as they bicker over a female, while the observers watch in growing dismay. The experiment fails as the baboons display no leadership qualities beyond brute force. The observers leave and the baboons vainly attempt to solve their power struggle, plotting, planning and weaving legends about their fictional battles with the cheetah, while it attacks the vulnerable. Issues of evolution are evidently at stake as the primates' interactions eerily begin to echo human society.

At first, the primates demonstrate only primitive consciousness, communicating through gesture: 'Hannibal beat his hands against his chest, letting out a great roar.

[727] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 31.
[728] Ibid., 40.

Stretching his neck forward he then stared down his rival. That meant: "What are you playing at? I'm leader"'.[729] The animals' instinctual fear is also conveyed, with physical sensations emphasised, often through repetition, as, for example, when one hears an unknown presence behind him: 'Hulagu stood to attention. Every part of him stood to attention'.[730]

Gradually, however, the baboons' communication evolves and al-Nayhūm emphasises how some of them begin 'talking to their heads', conveying a sense of wakening consciousness. This is particularly developed through Hannibal. Early on, al-Nayhūm specifies that 'His head had not yet begun talking', but, as dangers mount, he begins having heated internal debates:

> Wracked by fear, Hannibal clutched at straws and, at that moment, his head began to mock him within earshot of a wild peacock: 'So you want the girl do you? First, you've got to get colourful feathers and a fancy plumage like this peacock. Enough of that miserable, stinky fur', 'Hush!' said Hannibal to his head.[731]

Trapped within their consciousness and unable to relate to others, the baboons represent dawning visions of human alienation and conflict. As the novella progresses, they begin to speak properly, wrangling over power and possession of the most attractive female. Despite their rudimentary form, these interactions also increasingly mirror modern-day politics in grotesque form, as when Sun Yat-sen submits to Hannibal's superiority: 'He crawled on his belly towards Hannibal, his head pressed to the earth, which meant "Don't be mad. You're the leader and we all lick your balls"'.[732]

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[729] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Qurūd*, 15.
[730] Ibid., 56.
[731] Ibid., 83-4.
[732] Ibid., 21-22.

Later, Sun-Yat-sen attempts to overthrow Hannibal, mirroring the many coups plaguing the Arab world and Africa in the 1970s and 1980s, and perhaps specifically those within the RCC. The coup is then followed by a 'trial' (*maḥkama*), introduced from the observers' perspective: 'From the outside, the scene looked like a trial, but the observers had long since discovered that the baboons had absolutely no sense of justice. As they watched, Hannibal clambered onto the stage'.[733] While perhaps echoing the trial of Dimna in *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, the most famous fable from Arabic tradition, the scene most clearly symbolizes the trials, torture and public executions that were an increasing, and often televised, feature of Libyan life.[734] The modern trial, symbolised by the theatrical 'stage', is, however, contrasted to the brutally animal, as Sun-Yat-sen's grim punishment consists of dozens of baboons, beginning with Hannibal, coming forward to 'mount him' (*i'talāhu*).[735]

Later, Sun-Yat-sen, having been exiled, manages to survive the cheetah by accidentally brandishing a scorpion at it. As the cheetah flees, Sun-Yat-sen realises the scorpion's power and proceeds to subdue the other baboons through brandishing it at each of them as well. This leads to a domino-effect of coups as each baboon manages to seize power for a few days, entirely dedicated to celebrating his victory, before another steals his weapon. Eventually, other scorpions are found, resulting in a stale-mate, perhaps alluding to the Cold War, which reached a period of particular intensity in the early 1980s. More broadly, however, the baboon's use of scorpions represents a critique of all forms of coercion that humans use against one another, and it is perhaps

[733] Ibid., 21.
[734] Chorin, *Exit Gaddafi*, 46.
[735] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Qurūd*, 22.

significant that, shortly before the novella's publication, al-Nayhūm had worked on the *Mawsūʻa al-silāḥ al-muṣawwara* (1979; *The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Weaponry*).[736]

The baboon leaders' names further relate their bickering to a pan-historical perspective. Sinuhe (Sinūḥī) is the oldest, his name taken from an ancient Egyptian official (c. 2000 BCE), but perhaps also echoing that of Idrīs al-Sanūsī. Hannibal (Hānībāl) is the main leader, his name taken from the famous Carthaginian commander (247-182 BCE), and arguably representing Gaddafi. Most significantly, his name is spelled according to foreign pronunciation, as Hānībāl, while al-Nayhūm, in his historical writing, consistently uses the original Phoenician Ḥanā Baʻl.[737] The very spelling of the name may therefore represent a mockery of Gaddafi, who named one of his sons 'Hānībāl' in 1975. Hulagu (Hūlākū), meanwhile, is named after a vicious Mongol ruler (1218-1265), and is as stupid as he is brutal, while Sun Yat-sen (Sun Yat-san), named after the founding father of the Republic of China (1866-1925), is obsessed with launching coups against Hannibal. Ho Chi Minh (Hū Shī Minh), finally, is named after the Vietnamese Communist revolutionary leader (1890-1969), and is the supposedly smart one, whose use of weaponry and 'collective, armed combat' first prompt the observers' experiment.[738]

Taken from military commanders or political leaders, the contrast between the names and their primate counterparts creates constant irony, dramatising the 'animal' nature that, for al-Nayhūm, underlies all warfare. In some cases, his use of particular names is somewhat ambiguous. In his historical writing, for example, he praises Hannibal as a great leader, rendering it unclear why he should choose to satirise him in primate form. More research into his encyclopaedias may suggest why particular figures were

[736] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Mawsūʻa al-silāḥ al-muṣawwara* (Geneva: Dār al-Mukhtār, 1979).
[737] Al-Nayhūm, *Tārīkhunā: al-juzʼ al-thānī*, 129.
[738] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Qurūd*, 11.

selected and whether, as al-Faqīh suggests, they relate to specific members of Gaddafi's regime:

> He made the jungle into a symbolic version of what we saw around ourselves and – without difficulty – we could give his animals and monkeys the names of people we knew. If we were brave we could even give them our own names.[739]

Whatever al-Nayhūm's particular take on each primate, he expresses an overall cynicism concerning the rise and fall of empires, nations and ideologies, all buttressed by violence. In this way, the novella invites endless analogies with other regimes, with the Ugandan setting, for example, perhaps alluding to Idi Amin's brutal rule from 1971-1979, supported by Gaddafi.

Above all, the fable forces the reader to reflect on why society should run according to the law of the jungle, starkly contrasting those discussed in Chapter Three, in which animals embody a restraint and harmony that humans long to recover. *Al-Qurūd*, on the contrary, functions according to what Edward Clayton observes of traditional animal fables from ancient Greece and Rome: a use of irrational animals to urge humans to deploy their own reason, and build a democratic, just system, not based on the law of predation.[740] For this reason, 'glimmers of likeness' between human and animal are emphasised solely within an exploration of the destructive forces that humans must overcome, rather than in visions of alternative, creaturely communion. To achieve its effect, the novella both defamiliarizes its reader through the primitive consciousness of the animals it depicts, while remaining eerily familiar as they enact

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[739] Al-Faqīh, '*Ṣūra qalamiyya l-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm*,' *Watanona*, July 18, 2009, accessed April 27, 2016. http://www.libya-watanona.com/adab/aalfagih/af18079a.htm.

[740] Robert Clayton, 'Aesop, Aristotle and Animals: The Role of Fables in Human Life,' *Humanitas* 21 nos. 1-2 (2008): 197.

forms of sovereign power that reign over humans today. Consistently, it demands of its readers to decide whether the behaviour depicted could ever belong in human form.

Unlike many traditional fables, there is also no triumphant underdog or voice of reason in *al-Qurūd*, but only the inevitability of oppression. Eventually, the observers end their experiment, concluding that: 'Everything was fine, but not fine. Everything was middling (*bayna-bayna*). The experiment neither succeeded nor failed'.[741] Their full results are presented as a list: 'The primates did not fight/nor did they cease fighting/ They did not chase away the cheetah/nor did they cease chasing him around/ Nothing happened/nor did it cease happening'.[742] Repetition of the same negative structure emphasises the experiment's 'middling' nature, concluded by a final statement followed by ellipses: '*lam... wa-lam...*' ('Neither did... Nor did...'), hinting at all that could have been achieved. The eventual conclusion, 'Events most resembled a long journey into infinity', then sums up what has been alluded to throughout.[743] As the observers watch the primates' struggles, the fable suggests that they have not been significantly surpassed. Characterised by repetitive syntax and structure, *al-Qurūd* conveys a sense of circling and stagnation, of history coming full circle.

Excluding their grim conclusions, the observers (*murāqibūn*) remain silent throughout, their distance from the action emphasised by the adverb '*fawq*' (above), placed at the beginning of most sentences describing them.[744] This silent observation is, perhaps, the most obvious connection between *al-Qurūd* and al-Nayhūm's earlier fiction, paralleling the Eid sheep, 'curiously observing' al-Ḥājj al-Zarrūq, and Mas'ūd, 'silently observing' the rat, and the rat observing him back. It also, however, reveals the crucial difference between them, with the observing gaze becoming infused with less playfulness and

[741] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Qurūd*, 108.
[742] Ibid., 109.
[743] Ibid.
[744] Ibid., 3, 57, 78.

more despair, an apt vision of the plight of individual and intellectual in Gaddafi's regime, surrounded by brutality and suspicion. The direction of the gaze also shifts, with the human gazing in despair at the unwitting animal, embodying all the worst and most brutal of civilisation's flaws.

Moving away from Sufi sensibilities, al-Nayhūm's message is therefore both increasingly bleak, and increasingly humanist in nature. In 1978, responding to a question from al-Kūnī on why he chose the genre of animal fable, he states:

> The basic message is that of Jesus, and of the concept of our humanity, the concept that I am an animal, capable of becoming a human if I put great effort into it. The human is a social animal. This is the true definition. Woman gives birth not to a human, but to a little animal. If this animal is born in human conditions, it becomes human. But if it is born in the current conditions of our closed and tyrannical Arab society, it transforms into a caged animal, plundering and stealing [...] I want to provoke you. I want you to tell me: we are not predators and prey. We are divided only into individuals... one person and another and another. Whoever divides us into predators and prey is mistaken. If I push you to tell me that then I have succeeded. If I don't then I have failed.[745]

In al-Nayhūm's writing, 'humanity' is increasingly presented as an abstract, moral ideal, and the animal burdened with its flaws. In his fiction, meanwhile, humans disappear almost entirely, relegated to silent, despairing gazes. In *al-Ḥayawānāt*, for example, the only possibly 'human' presence is the narrator who, like the 'observers' in *al-Qurūd*, grows slowly more despairing as the jungle animals' complicity with their tyrannical rulers becomes apparent. While beginning with the rhythmic tone of a public storyteller, the voice itself also becomes increasingly complicit, slipping from

[745] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Ḥiwār*, 32-33.

scene to scene but never gaining a concrete narrative presence. Observing the animals being tortured, as 'the age of rights gives way to that of interrogation', it declares, 'we retreat, pretending we were never there'.[746] With each repetition, the phrase also alters slightly, moving from 'pretending we were never there' to 'pretending we cannot see', 'cannot talk', 'cannot hear' and, eventually, 'cannot feel'.[747] The novel's final lines conclude its complicity with the tone of a maxim:

> Let us now part ways in health, before we meet again without it, and let the story of the jungle be a warning to us, for none of us says what will cause him to lose his head, and none of us hears what will cause him to lose his mind.[748]

Ellusive, and never gaining a physical narrative presence, the narrator engages in dialogue, but, instead of the second person 'you', addresses the third person 'we', never specifying who is the audience, who the narrator and who the animals. Both *al-Ḥayawānāt* and *al-Qurūd* therefore indicate the author's movement away from society, and from the complexities of the human condition, with fear and brutality overriding all, in animal form. In his wider writing, meanwhile, a contrast is increasingly drawn between visions of utopian 'human' society and the dystopian 'jungle' (*ghāba*), providing an important theoretical backdrop to *al-Ḥayawānāt* and *al-Qurūd*, their sharp move away from the 'naïve Sufism' of al-Nayhūm's early work, and the humanist vision of progress and evolution upon which they are based.

Animal Society, Human Society

Themes of evolution, and humans' moral responsibility, are undoubtedly evident in al-Nayhūm's work prior to Gaddafi's rise to power. They seem, however, to have become

[746] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Ḥayawānāt*, 34-43.
[747] Ibid.
[748] Ibid., 135.

accentuated by it, with 'humanity' increasingly signifying all that is opposed to violence, submissive acquiescence and blind desire for power. In 1969, for example, al-Nayhūm published an article in *al-Ḥaqīqa* entitled, '*Kullamā fataḥa Allāh bāban li-l-insān qāmat al-falsafa warā'ahu zinzāna*' ('When God opens a door for humanity, philosophy builds a prison behind it').[749] The article represents a response to Gaddafi's coup, suggesting that, although such revolutionary moments represent opportunities for humans to flourish, those in power must reject absolute ideologies. With frightening foresight, it warns of the 'cages', 'armed police' and even 'gallows' that result from not allowing society to 'practise its humanity' (*yumāris insāniyyatahu*).[750]

Meanwhile, in his first notorious encounter with Gaddafi at the Revolutionary Intellectuals Seminar in 1970, al-Nayhūm addressed issues of freedom and tyranny through the symbolism of cows and a herdsman, cementing animal allegory as the means through which he would address the regime.[751] Despite being bullied into silence during the seminar, the theme of 'animal' and 'human' society swiftly returns in *Niqāsh* (1973; *Discussion*), the version of his lectures to the RCC that he published after becoming concerned over public perceptions of his relationship with the regime. Drawing on Erich Fromm, al-Nayhūm defines 'animal societies' as those driven by the instinct to survive and proliferate, while 'human societies', using their 'reason', can and should achieve 'growth'.[752] Despite this, civilisation has almost unilaterally rejected 'reason', failing to become human and leading to an endless procession of wars and, ultimately, terrible inventions such as the atomic bomb.[753]

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[749] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Kullamā fataḥa Allāh bāban li-l-insān qāmat al-falsafa warā'ahu zinzāna*,' in *Kalimāt al-ḥaqq al-qawiyya*, 237.
[750] Ibid., 244.
[751] For more details of the seminar, see: Taji-Farouki, 'Sadiq Nayhum,' 261-4; and John Davis, *Libyan Politics: Tribe and Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1987), 73.
[752] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, *Niqāsh* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2001), 11.
[753] Ibid., 33, 37, 76.

The terms 'animal' and 'human' society also continue to appear in his articles. '*Ribāṭ al-'unq*' (1970; 'Necktie'), for example, is subtitled 'A Shameful Story, which, thank God, happened in a nonhuman society (*mujtama' ghayr insānī*)', and portrays a pack of penguins rejecting one who is the wrong colour.[754] In others, evolution is an explicit theme. In the lengthy introduction to *Fursān bilā ma'raka* (1972; *A Battleless Knight*), for example, al-Nayhūm considers the oppression of women through the development of family structures in humans' primate ancestors, declaring that 'We cannot even glimpse the ape that inhabits us, if our gaze remains that of that self-same ape'.[755]

Finally, discussion of the distinctions between 'human' and 'animal' also emerge through al-Nayhūm's studies of Islam and the Qur'ān, visible in his work from both before and after 1969. In *Niqāsh*, for example, he attaches moral values to different elements of creation, arguing that the 'clay' (*turāb*) from which Adam is made symbolises not humble origins, but potential for 'growth', while the 'fire' (*nār*) from which Satan is made is designed only to consume.[756] For al-Nayhūm, however, human potential has come to fruition only rarely, primarily in the reign of Muḥammad and the four rightly-guided caliphs, with the Qur'ān representing a 'legal constitution', rejecting the 'law of the jungle' (*sharī'at al-ghāba*):

> The Qur'ān does not address all living beings, but only the one who knows he is legally responsible for the future, and that abandoning that responsibility is a denial not of the *sharia* but of the right of life to move beyond the *sharia* of the jungle.[757]

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[754] Al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm, '*Ribāṭ al-'unq*,' in *Kalimāt al-ḥaqq al-qawiyya*, 275-280.

[755] Al-Ṣādiq Al-Nayhūm, '*Muqaddima*,' in *Fursān bilā ma'raka* (Tripoli: Tāla li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 2001), 32-33.

[756] Al-Nayhūm, *al-'Awda*, 116-117.

[757] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Islām fī-l-asr*, 83, 106.

As Nasser Rabbat observes, al-Nayhūm's call for the 'perfect time of the Prophet' is certainly not novel within 'Islamic utopian formulations of the last two centuries'.[758] The extent to which al-Nayhūm associates the 'human' with morality is, nevertheless, striking within the development of his fiction and thought as a whole.

In his seven-volume history of Libya, *Tārīkhunā* (1976; *Our History*), al-Nayhūm's vision of ideal human society stretches into the even deeper past. In it, he identifies 'cooperation', a trait distinctly lacking from *al-Qurūd*, as what allowed humanity to conquer other species, before it was itself wracked by divisions:

> From the darkness of those vast ages emerged the human, at the beginning of the first Stone Age, a strange, and even astonishing, hunter, unlike any known until then. This hunter had no claws or fangs, nor was he a swift runner, or equipped with savage muscles. If he had lived according to the previous rules of existence, he would no doubt have found nothing to feed his young. The characteristic of the human, however, was that he did not walk the previous paths.[759]

Depicting human deep history as another idyllic period, when '*Allāh's* land' (*arḍ Allāh*) was 'the people's land' (*arḍ al-nāss*), al-Nayhūm focusses on aspects of communality depicted in Saharan cave paintings, from dance to hair dyeing and hunting.[760] Offering a wistful view of past unity, his history therefore represents what the human species, and Libyan nation, have failed to become. This, fundamentally, is the crux of his depiction of animals in both *al-Ḥayawānāt* and *al-Qurūd*, in which creaturely and spiritual poetics give way to harsh messages concerning the descent of society into violence. The force of their messages, and the abstract terms in which they are

[758] Nasser Rabbat, 'The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space,' *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012): 201.
[759] Al-Nayhūm, *Tārīkhunā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 50.
[760] Al-Nayhūm, *Ḥiwār*, 5.

expressed, may be attributed to al-Nayhūm's continued efforts to effect real social change. Witnessing the tragic events within his nation, his fiction became bleaker, but no less engaging. As his conversation with al-Kūnī reveals, his aim was to make his readers question themselves, employing the most provocative means to do so and, unusually in Libyan fiction, portraying animals in a profoundly negative light, so as to preserve the notion of an ideal 'humanity'.

In Praise of Monkeys: Rethinking Beastliness

Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's short story collection, *Fī hijā' al-bashar wa-madīḥ al-bahā'im wa-l-ḥasharāt* (2009; *In Praise of Beasts and Crawlies: A Treatise against Humankind*), opens, as discussed in my introduction, with Qur'ān 6:38, describing animals as 'nations like you' (*umamun amthālakum*). Below this, a proverb from Rabindranath Tagore's (1861-1941) poetry collection *Stray Birds* (1916) is also cited: 'Man is worse than an animal when he is an animal'.[761] As these citations, along with the collection's title, suggest, the impulse behind it starkly contrasts al-Nayhūm's vision of 'human' and 'animal' societies. Rather than blaming the animal in the human, it condemns the way in which humanity has emerged from the animal. Each story portrays humans' propensity to violence, madness and alienation, to which animals, most frequently, fall victim. As discussed in my introduction, the collection combines specific political allegory with more far-reaching existential contemplation.[762] In '*al-Nisnās qabl al-ghurūb*' ('Monkeys before Sunset'), a specifically evolutionary perspective is also brought to this.

In the story, a female school teacher lives in mortal fear of apes after reading a tale from al-Jāḥīz's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, recounting the rape of women by male primates. Unfortunately, she is then transferred to a school in the Atlas Mountains, and must

[761] Al-Faqīh, *Fī hijā'*, 7.

[762] See pages 25-6 of my introduction.

walk every day through a 'forest' (*ghāba*), 'colonized' (*musta'mara*) by a species of ape famous for being the closest of all primates to humans.[763] The monkeys' similarity to humans is emphasised, described as 'the most intelligent type of monkey, the most able to mimic humans, live in harmony with human societies and behave like humans'.[764] This similarity becomes the principal reason for the teacher's fear, and she becomes terrified to such an extent that her husband recruits a young girl to accompany her. One day, however, both are attacked by three men, who attempt to drag them into the forest. They manage to escape only with the help of a fortuitous passer-by. At this point, the teacher realises that monkeys are the least of her worries, since some human behaviours simply do not exist outside the species, even in the closest primate species. Having come to this transforming realisation, she then sees a monkey peering curiously down from the trees:

> I looked at him regretfully and apologetically, seeking his forgiveness for the injustice I had done him and his kin by considering them a source of danger to me and all women, when the danger actually lay in a variety of human which causes all the jungle beasts (*wuḥūsh al-ghāba*) to feel ashamed, and to reject that lowest level of vileness (*al-khissa*), depravity (*al-nadhāla*) and beastliness (*al-waḥshiyya*).[765]

Switching the trait of 'beastliness' from human to animal, the story dramatises the opening quote from Tagore, suggesting that particular perversions are specific to humanity, in contrast to the natural behaviours of the animal world. This also gains a more specific political dimension in a short story from an earlier collection by al-Faqīh, '*Azmat al-dimuqrāṭiyya fī-l-'ālam al-'arabī*' ('The Crisis of Democracy in the Arab

[763] Al-Faqīh, '*al-Nisnās*,' 44.
[764] Ibid., 45.
[765] Ibid., 49.

World').[766] In the story, an intellectual, giving a speech on the origins of political injustice, is swiftly booed off stage for his radical ideas. Among these ideas is the suggestion that, to become truly 'human', humans must cast off the various negative qualities which they have gained through evolution:

> Here we arrive at the strangest and most incredible of paradoxes in human history: in order to become human, the human abandons and forgets his humanity [...] The human can only fully assume his humanity if he renounces the characteristics that he has acquired through lying (*al-kidhb*), deception (*al-bāṭil*) and fakery (*al-tazwīr*), using them to build a wall between him and his fellow earthly creatures (*rifāqihi min kā'ināt al-arḍ*). Therefore, any Arab human who removes his fake human outfit, making himself equal with his fellow creatures in the forest (*rifāqihi min kā'ināt al-ghāba*), and living like them, trodden by the footsteps of rulers, kicked by the boots of armies and crushed by the catastrophes which they provoke, consolidates the principles of brotherhood (*al-ukhūwa*) and equality (*al-musāwāt*) among the animal kingdom.[767]

Like al-Nayhūm, al-Faqīh comments on the tyrannical nature of Arab societies through imagery of animality, yet in a manner diametrically opposed. Elsewhere, he also depicts a vision of lost human 'brotherhood' and 'equality', predictably based in society's closer proximity to nature, rather than the notion of a human *sharia*, replacing that of the jungle. In *Hādhihi tukhūm mamlaktī* (1991; *These are the Borders of My Kingdom*), the second novel in his trilogy, *Hadā'iq al-layl* (1991; *Gardens of the Night*), the main character, Khalīl, disillusioned with Libyan society, embarks on what Ali Ahmida

[766] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*Azmat al-dimuqrāṭiyya fi-l-'ālam al-'arabī*,' in *Khams khanāfis tuḥākim al-shajara*, 23-42 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1997).
[767] Ibid., 41.

describes as a 'Sufi spiritual journey to a utopian city of the past'.[768] After visiting a powerful Sufi sheikh, he finds himself walking through a 'sun-burnt wasteland', before reaching a palace 'surrounded by gardens and pools of water'.[769] This is Coral City, a land of plenty, inhabited by a peaceful population, inspired by the characters of *Alf Layla wa-layla*. As Khalīl learns from the Sheikh Jalāl al-Dīn, the people also derive their spiritual wisdom and sense of justice from nature:

> He asked me if I had absorbed the meaning of his words, to consider carefully the essential nature of man who had inherited the experience of the innumerable generations which had gone before him, who had made use of his ability to contemplate the system by which all existence was governed and who scooped up the wisdom of the birds which know where light comes from, the wisdom of the trees which understand the secrets of the seasons, and the wisdom of the grass, springs, clouds and stars which together create the splendour of nature and give their bounty to mankind [...].[770]

After some time within the kingdom, Khalīl is driven by curiosity to open a forbidden door, which unleashes a 'yellow air' that obliterates everything.[771] Again, the sad facts of human reality are thus contrasted to a vision of its potential, suggesting, like al-Nayhūm, that something has gone wrong on the historical path of civilisation. Returning to '*al-Nisnās qabl al-ghurūb*' and '*Azmat al-dimuqrāṭiyya fī-l-'ālam al-'arabī*', this may be attributed to traits of 'vileness', 'depravity' and 'beastliness', as well as 'lying', 'deception' and 'fakery'. In juxtaposing human to monkey, al-Faqīh's vision is,

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[768] Ahmida, *Forgotten Voices*, 59. Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, *Hādhihi tukhūm mamlakatī* (London: Riad el-Rayyes, 1991); trans. Russell Harris, Amin al-Ayouti and Suraya Allam, *Gardens of the Night: A Trilogy* (London: Quartet Book, 1995).

[769] Al-Faqīh, *Gardens of the Night*, 186, 189.

[770] Ibid., 191.

[771] Ibid., 288.

therefore, equally as harsh as that of al-Nayhūm, though identifying blame in a different source. In the short stories of ʻAbdallāh al-Quwayrī, meanwhile, the picture is less clear-cut, with anonymous, angst-ridden human characters constantly juxtaposed to their primate counterparts, and visions of the creaturely reality of each clouding straightforward moral perspectives.

Apes, Cafés and Cages: Human and Monkey as Point and Counterpoint

Like ʻAlī Muṣṭafā al-Miṣrātī, ʻAbdallāh al-Quwayrī (1930-1992) was born and raised in Egypt after his family emigrated there during the Italian occupation. In 1955, he graduated from the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University, where he also began writing, and, in 1957, he returned to Libya and became involved in journalism, publishing regularly in *al-Ḥaqīqa*, while also continuing to publish short stories and plays. After returning to Libya, al-Faqīh observes how his fiction also shifted markedly from social realism, which dominates his early collection, *Ḥayātuhum* (1960; *Their Life*), into experimentation, focussed on the 'inner world of his characters'.[772] His fiction is, as al-Faqīh puts it, particularly characterised by 'loneliness, alienation and estrangement', increasing in the 1970s and 1980s, when, like many authors, he also published increasingly less.[773]

Alienation and estrangement emerge in particularly striking form in the evolutionary imagery of a series of ten short stories that al-Quwayrī published in his collection *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-ʻankabūt* (1972; *A Web the Spider didn't Weave*). Like the stories examined, nearly all feature the word '*qird*' or '*qurūd*' in the title, and juxtapose vignettes of apes in a forest to scenes of human life in cafés, homes, schools or streets. Making no commentary on the juxtaposition of the two, al-Quwayrī leaves the reader to decide

[772] Al-Faqīh, *Libyan Short Story*, 229.
[773] Ibid., 230.

how one narrative strand informs the other, formulating a series of point and counterpoint. Through contrasting, yet also subtly overlapping, themes, images and syntax, ape life is set against human life.

Most of the stories begin and end with scenes from the jungle, with the interim action concerning humans. In a few, apes and humans also interact, and, in one, humans discuss the distinctions between apes and their own species, hinting at how the preceding stories may be read. In all, the creaturely reality of both species is explored to a greater extent than in the work of al-Miṣrātī, al-Nayhūm and al-Faqīh, dwelling on how each species registers the surrounding world, and interacts through touch, smell and sound. The simple, communal existence of the apes, and their instinctual reactions to touch and sound, are, above all, contrasted to humans' more complex world, primarily characterised by conflict and alienation, but also by the potential for creativity.

Introduced in the 'jungle' (*al-ghāba*), the first story, '*al-Qird taḥta al-shajara*' ('Apes beneath Trees'), exemplifies this:

> The ape looked this way and that, this way and that. The sky was heavy with clouds (*al-samā' mulabbada bi-l-ghuyūm*) and wind gusted through the branches. The habitual rustle of leaves accompanied the sound of the slow flow of water into the river. The ground was matted with twigs, its scent mimicking that of the trees. Sometimes birds sang and sometimes they were silent. Most did not fly far. For some moments the air was filled with lowing, grunting and bellowing. But the ape paid no heed and nor did his female. She gestured with her arm and her young followed her to the ground. They began jumping and

> leaping around her. The male began scratching his side, and his female came over to help him.[774]

Dwelling on sight, sound, touch and smell, the passage is characteristic of most of the ape scenes which follow. In all, little of significance transpires, and emphasis is placed on description of the animals. As in al-Nayhūm's *al-Qurūd*, a rhythmic quality is generated through repetition and rhyme, with description of the sky, 'heavy with clouds', echoing across the stories, as well as the apes' 'screaming' (*ṣārikhīn*) and 'leaping' (*qāfizīn*). These effects, creating a soothing quality, evoke a wildlife documentary, stripped of external narrative. '*al-Qird taḥta al-shajara*' is, for example, simply concluded as the apes spot a snake on the ground and retreat into the trees.

In parallel, the human action takes place in a smoke and sweat-filled café where an unnamed character lounges, observing other anonymous people around him. As in the ape vignette, smell is emphasised through reference to 'the stink of cigarettes' (*rā'iḥat al-dukhān*), 'stale breath' (*al-anfās rākida*) and 'sweat' (*'araq*).[775] Too lethargic even to drink coffee, the character reluctantly chats to a casual acquaintance sitting next to him, driven not by a desire to do so but by a fear of offending him. The men's inability to engage in meaningful conversation or enjoy one another's presence is emphasised:

> No sooner had he finished his sentence than a wave of melancholy (*suhūm*) overwhelmed him. He turned to the man next to him, immersed in an identical melancholy. He resented him for not listening then resented himself for not finishing his sentence.[776]

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[774] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qird taḥt al-shajara*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 38.
[775] Ibid., 38-39.
[776] Ibid., 40.

Like the jungle scene, detailed description overrides significant narrative events, with the main character eavesdropping on the conversations of old ladies, and describing their 'scrawny hands' and 'cracked lips'.[777] The scene also simply ends as he considers approaching a young 'perfumed woman' who enters the café, before watching her pay and leave. Through this abrupt conclusion, the narrative aptly reflects the lives of the characters portrayed within it, lost, lacklustre and alone. The simple juxtaposition of their habits to the monkey's instinctual movements further creates a dizzying picture of the transformation of one form of life into the other, and the open-endedness of time yet to come.

The second story, '*al-Qird ṣaghīran*' ('Portait of an Ape when Young'), again opens with apes, moving from description of purely tangible sensations into the beginnings of emotion and thought, deeply rooted in the physical. The scene focuses on a young ape, driven to climb trees and hang from branches by an 'energy' (*nishāṭ*) and 'constant state of alertness' (*ḥāla mutawāṣila min al-yaqẓa*).[778] Rather than solely bookending the human drama, a total of four ape vignettes serve as counterpoints to it. In them, the young animal's joy is emphasised as he finds a cool stream of water, leading him into a state of 'intoxication' (*nashwa*), which causes him to begin 'screaming with joy' (*yaṣrukh faraḥan*).[779]

In the human section, meanwhile, he is paralleled to a young, tormented adolescent, driven to distraction by his attempts to write, tearing up paper and searching for an elusive idea. Switching in and out of his frustrated stream of consciousness, the narrative also moves to his mother as she reflects on how, 'her son was always alone, speaking to no one as though he had his own private world, in which he would speak to

[777] Ibid., 41.
[778] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qird ṣaghīran*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 46.
[779] Ibid., 48.

whom he pleased, hidden from the world of people'.[780] Like so many of al-Quwayrī's stories, the boy dramatises the pitfalls of creativity, alienating the individual from the company of others. His solitude is, however, also reflected in the simpler loneliness of the young ape, as he searches for companions:

> He waved to another young ape to follow him, but he did not move. He came closer flapping his arms at him, but he did not move. He looked at his father, and saw no sign of either encouragement or rebuffal. He looked at his mother, her head buried between her knees. He approached two other small apes, but did not succeed in dislodging them, so he left them in peace above the branches, and descended to the earth.[781]

As in al-Nayhūm's *al-Qurūd*, the concept of solitude begins to be extended to apes, entangled with its more complex manifestations among people.[782] Unlike *al-Qurūd*, however, al-Quwayrī's story simply dwells in the differing creaturely sensations of human and monkey, from elation to frustration and solitude. This is also apparent in several of the following stories. In '*al-Qird yaqfiz waḥīdan*' ('The Ape Leaps Alone'), for example, a 'solitary ape' stands outside the joyful communality of others. The reason for his solitude is not explained, but simply his state of 'withdrawal' (*tankīs*).[783] In the concluding section, the ape finally joins his kin, yet the simple fact of this withdrawal remains:

> Hesitating, he approached the apes, and it did not take long before he was among them, leaping and screeching/ Screeching and leaping (*yaqfiz wa-yaṣrukh*, *yaṣrukh wa-yaqfiz*)./ The apes' howls rent the silence, and he remained

[780] Ibid., 49.
[781] Ibid., 46.
[782] Ibid., 51.
[783] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qird waḥīdan*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 77.

> alone, leaping and screeching, leaping and screeching (*yabqā waḥīdan yaqfiz wa-yaṣrukh, yaqfiz wa-yaṣrukh*).[784]

Mimicking the rest of his species, while also 'alone', the animal serves as the primordial embodiment of all the anguished outcasts in the human scenes. Repetitive language, describing the monkeys 'leaping and screeching/screeching and leaping', creates the impression of the circling nature of social interaction, and of the individual lost within it.

In both '*al-Qurūd wa-l-kalimāt*' ('Apes and Words') and '*al-Qird lā yakdhib*' ('Apes don't Lie'), the development of language is also explored as a cause of further isolation. In the first, a long, bitter debate between men is juxtaposed to the peaceful, nonverbal existence of apes:

> Calm (*al-hudū'*) was the main concept reigning over the apes. They did not think about it, but simply grew still when they felt the need for it. And they needed it a lot, not just at night, but during the daytime too. The apes did not feel the need for speech. They did not think about words, nor feel their lack from their lives. Screaming, moving, leaping and clinging to trees were all quite sufficient.[785]

The men, meanwhile, appear as follows: 'Eyes were blazing, faces taut, and hands clenching different objects. Some clutched at their chairs while others shredded paper or snapped up matchsticks'.[786] The men's speech is also laden with rancour: 'You're an individualist (*fardī*). I've always said so but they didn't believe me... You don't want to listen to anyone's views but your own'.[787] Language thus sets men apart in a scene

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[784] Ibid., 83.
[785] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qurūd wa-l-kalimāt*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 59.
[786] Ibid., 61.
[787] Ibid., 60.

typical of al-Quwayrī's oppressive fictional world. As al-Faqīh comments, 'There is hardly any story of his where the character is not on the point of explosion'.[788] The story, meanwhile, concludes among the apes, both continuing the theme of the human scene, and profoundly indifferent to it in the discrete jungle universe:

> Screaming. Moving. Jumping (*al-ṣurākh wa-l-ḥaraka wa-l-qafz*). With all that, the apes had no need for words. After their rest, they returned to the trees, one after the other, and perched on the branches. They didn't want to return to the earth. The sky was heavy with clouds (*kānat al-samā' mulabbada bi-l-ghuyūm*) and the breeze seemed to be laden with flames.[789]

In '*al-Qird lā yakdhib*', the penultimate story, two human scenes are then juxtaposed, the first involving unnamed individuals attempting to conclude a deal, and the second a dialogue between a teacher and student concerning humans' evolution from apes. In the first, the men swiftly descend into accusations and manipulation, while, in the second, the concept of 'lying' (*al-kidhb*) and its connection to human consciousness is explored. This strand opens with the teacher announcing to the student that 'deep within each of us is an ape':

> The ape is very close to us. It is a developed animal, possessing intelligence, with its own patterns of behaviour and society. In its face, I sometimes perceive the glimmers of reflection. But its progress has been slow, or perhaps conditions have stood in its way.[790]

After being informed that the divergences in human and ape life arise primarily through the former's propensity for 'experimentation' (*al-tajriba*) and 'imagination' (*al-*

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[788] Al-Faqīh, *Libyan Short Story*, 231.

[789] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qurūd wa-l-kalimāt*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 64.

[790] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qird lā yakdhib*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 92-93.

taṣawwur), the student wonders whether this is what makes humans, rather than apes, able and willing to lie.[791] In response, the teacher declares:

> The purpose of experimentation is not to lie, but to tell the truth. Monkeys don't lie and humans who live in clean societies, and engage in sound, truthful experimentation do not lie either. The purpose of life is truth, and truth is both the means and the end.[792]

The student listens to the teacher's words in silence, casting them into dubious doubt, particularly as they are juxtaposed to the previous scene, in which human language is used solely to gain the upper hand.

The final story, '*al-Qurūd fī-l-qafaṣ*' ('The Apes in the Cage'), then moves back to juxtaposition of human and ape life, with apes in a cage contrasted to heated dialogues between another outcast individual and his friends, berating him for retreating into solitude. In response, he questions: 'Don't we grow tired of chat (*a-lā namull min al-ḥadīth*)? Always circling round and round as though in a cage?'.[793] Through the rest of his conversations, the motif of this 'cage' continues, portraying social conventions and expectations as fatal limits, from which there is no escape. It is also literally dramatised in the opening and concluding scenes, depicting caged apes. In the first, the animals frantically grab the iron bars, 'leaping' in frustration. In the second, they become silent, seeing a human approach:

> The apes suddenly fell silent and gathered together, frozen in the middle of the cage floor. They had all become gazes (*kulluhā naẓarāt*), pointed in one direction. They did not move. They just stared and stared, their eyes fixed on him. He held

[791] Ibid., 95.
[792] Ibid., 97.
[793] Al-Quwayrī, '*al-Qurūd fī-l-qafaṣ*,' in *Khayṭ lam yansujhā al-'ankabūt*, 101.

> a stick (*'aṣan*) in his hand, which he pointed at them in successive jolts (*fī hazzāt mutawāliyya*). After that, the apes no longer saw the bars of the cage.[794]

In contrast to al-Nayhūm's *al-Qurūd*, this scene negotiates the species divide through apes observing humans. In the process, the animals' silence and stillness comment upon all the chaos and angst that have been depicted in the stories' human scenes, with the menacing man embodying a foreboding sense of the unknown. The monkey's cage, meanwhile, serves both as a literal vision of human cruelty to animals, and a symbolic critique of evolution, with apes representing the animal 'self' that has been repressed, ending as the man appears to shoot them with his 'stick'.

Unlike al-Nayhūm, al-Quwayrī gives humans no advantage over apes, portraying one beside the other, and offering no vision of an idealised paradise, lost in the movement from one form of being to the other. Described in their warm, breezy jungle, apes, in all ten stories, seem to enjoy a more appealing way of being than humans, with their free movement contrasting humans' self-imposed imprisonment. However, the negative human traits of lying, alienation and conflict, arising from the ability to imagine and experiment are, for al-Quwayrī, also what lead to bursts of creativity. The human condition is therefore imagined as one of isolation but also of potential, bought at a heavy cost.

Conclusion

In the fiction of all four authors, the similarity of human and ape is negotiated through processes of observation. In each, the perspective remains largely external to the primates, as they are studied, judged, pursued and experimented on. Within these processes, their consciousness is conveyed only in fragmentary and rudimentary form, dramatising the fundamental question mark which hovers over the human past. The

[794] Ibid., 104.

trope of the jungle (*ghāba*) also recurs in each, a space that humans are keen to study and tame, and whose 'law' is juxtaposed in different ways to human civilisation, both in the form of Gaddafi's *Jamāhiriyya* and the empires that paved the way for it. Through both monkey and jungle, varied statements are made on the processes that have brought humanity to where it is today, with alienation and division at the heart of all, suggesting that, somewhere along the line, civilisation has taken a fateful turn for the worst. Beyond this, each author offers only the vaguest hope of a more harmonious way of being, accessed through an idealised return to nature, or the potentially redeeming traits of creativity and reason.

Chapter 6 – 'Bonds, ancient and inscrutable': Human History through Other Eyes

While Charles Darwin's theory of evolution undoubtedly transformed humans' perceptions of their 'self' and animal 'other', we have, as John Berger remarks, been identifying ourselves with animals, and using them to fathom facets of our own existence, long before *On the Origin of Species*:

> Darwin's evolutionary theory, indelibly stamped as it is with the marks of the European 19th century, nevertheless belongs to a tradition almost as old as man himself. Animals interceded between man and their origin because they were both like and unlike man [...] The parallelism of their similar/dissimilar lives allowed animals to provoke some of the first questions and offer answers. The first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal.[795]

In this chapter, I focus on mythic narratives of creation and fall, in which unexpected forms of 'similarity' and 'dissimilarity' emerge between humans and animals. Unlike the 'ape stories' examined, featuring often distanced observation in jungle settings, the animal, in these mythic visions, moves into more diverse spaces, from desert to burrow to the human body itself. Myth, history and the physicality of the creaturely condition also become entangled, and intertextual references abound in the form of tales-within-tales and epigraphs, weaving the present into the past, and the human into the nonhuman. Fables, too, feature prominently, in etiological rather than ethical form, as

[795] Berger, *Why Look?*, 15-16.

animals narrate human history, observing or commenting upon it with a mixture of fear and condemnation.

Unsettling narratives of origin, ascent and fall, these animals represent a broader tendency in modern fiction to rethink myths from unfamiliar perspectives, challenging the divisions they cement.[796] In Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's study of Canadian author, Timothy Findlay's, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* (1984), for example, they examine his rewriting of the Noah's Ark story through its animal characters, exposing the hierarchies the story consolidates, and questioning its traditional interpretation as a straightforward narrative of salvation.[797] In this chapter, I focus on how Libyan fiction similarly rethinks the place of animals within myth and the civilising process, and, in so doing, highlights the plight of all victims, and identifies fundamental fault lines within society.

Variations on human fall are my particular focus, from tales of man's first subjugation of animal, to rewritings of Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel. I first return to Kamal Ben Hameda's *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* (2011; *Under the Tripoli Sky*) and Aḥmad al-Faytūrī's *Sarīb* (2001; *A Long Story*), reflecting on how tales of deep fall comment upon themes of coming-of-age, examined in Part One. I then move from the animal fable, and the perspective of the child, to that of the 'prehuman', examining the narrative voice of an unborn child in Najwā Bin Shatwān's *Wabr al-aḥṣina* (2007; *The Horses' Hair*). My final focus is Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's plural vision of origins, following the trail of desert animals into the depths of the past on a quest for elusive truth. Final comparative perspectives are then offered on al-Kūnī and al-Nayhūm.

[796] Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, 162.
[797] Ibid.

Unhappy Endings: Telling Tales of Human Violence

Both Aḥmad al-Faytūrī's *Sarīb* and Kamal Ben Hameda's *La compagnie des Tripolitaines* are, as discussed in Chapters One and Two, told from the perspective of reminiscing adults, intertwined with the voice of their younger selves. Conveying the tone of memoir, interspersed with folk tales, striking parallels emerge between their depictions of coming-of-age in 1960s' Libya, and the deeper temporalities and animal perspectives to which they are juxtaposed. With the first set in Benghazi and the second in Tripoli, both depict vibrant and multicultural cities, before Gaddafi's rise to power, and dwell on female characters, formative in the narrators' upbringing. Return to childhood thus coincides with return to a brief, though by no means problem-free, lull in the land's long brutal history. Between empire, colony, warzone and dictatorship, the space of childhood stands, filled with tales of magic and animals, but also destined to disappear.

In both, this also prefigures return to recent as well as deep history, conveyed through the voices of female relatives, narrating their experiences of World War Two and Italian colonisation, alongside animal tales that emerge organically from them, relaying primordial visions of human fall and violence. In telling these tales, women clearly associate their own traumatic pasts with the animal narrators or protagonists. Dramatising Walter Benjamin's definition of the story-teller as the one who 'takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others', they move from collective human experience into collective creaturely experience.[798] In the process, the human-animal divide is rethought, with sharper distinctions emerging between predator and prey, and even male and female.

[798] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller,' in *Illuminations* (Pimlico: London, 1999), 87.

Like the narratives that frame them, the animal tales also have unhappy or open endings, disrupting the motifs of the traditional tale, characterised, as Jack Zipes observes, by a quest for the 'real home'.[799] Drawing upon Ernst Block, Zipes observes how this quest involves overcoming oppression to establish a more just space, with the 'underdog' or 'small person' using their wits 'not only to survive but also to live a better life'.[800] As Zipes further comments, however, 'home' and 'happy ending' may also be disrupted to powerful effect in modern rewritings.[801] Such is the case in *Sarīb* and *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, where animal tales deny both the optimism of children's story and teleology of sacred history, denouncing clear beginnings and happy endings as nonhuman voices return to a time before myth, and 'other worlds' outside 'home' and nation. In the process, the ambivalent movement of humanity into civilisation is paralleled to that of nation into tyranny and also of the narrators into adulthood, a bleak vision no doubt informed by both authors' own experiences of adulthood, irrevocably marked by Gaddafi's rise to power.

Underdogs

Born in Benghazi in 1955, al-Faytūrī was, from an early age, involved in the Libyan cultural scene, cofounding the al-Ahli Theatre Group at eighteen and becoming editor-in-chief of *al-Usbūʿ al-ʿthaqāfī* (*The Cultural Week*), the first weekly Arab newspaper specialising in culture. In 1978, however, he was among a large group of intellectuals sentenced to death for alleged Communist activities. Later, this sentence was reduced to life-imprisonment, and, following an amnesty in 1988, al-Faytūrī was released from Abū Salīm Prison after ten years. Even while being held, he continued to write, putting together a journal for other inmates entitled *al-Nawāfir* (*Fountains*), produced from

[799] Zipes, *Fairy Tales*, 174.
[800] Ibid.
[801] Ibid., 177.

cigarette papers. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he continued to publish novels, plays and literary critical studies, while also becoming editor-in-chief of *al-Mayādīn*, a Benghazi weekly, whose title refers to the 'public squares' where many Arab Spring movements began.

Sarīb, published in 2000, is set in 1960s' Benghazi, and dedicated to al-Faytūrī's Berber grandmother, Buraybish. The two main characters within the memoir, part-autobiographical and part-fictional, are also a grandson and his grandmother, with the memories and folk tales of the latter emerging often imperceptibly from the narrative voice of the former. Living alone on a hill overlooking Benghazi, they inhabit a folkloric universe where animals feature prominently and youth and old age stand in opposition to the male, adult world. The grandmother, in particular, is portrayed as a magical, fairy-tale creature, strongly connected to animals, and to 'all things small'.[802] So strong is her fondness for ants, prompted by their diligence and mention in the Qur'ān (27:18-19), that her grandson, returning home to find her absent one day, even believes her to have metamorphosed into one.[803] As the narrative progresses, however, the grandson increasingly moves away from this fairy tale world into that of politics, violence and hard truths about the human condition. Through the intertwining of both worlds, creaturely experience emerges both as a symbol of solidarity among the vulnerable, and a grim recognition of the fate of all to live within the law of predator and prey.

Central to my examination of *Sarīb* is the final tale that grandmother tells grandson, narrating the beginning of human domination of animals. To a large extent, this tale is incongruous to the grandmother's initial stories, in which the underdog triumphs and 'home' is re-established through use of wit and the help of animal companions. '*Nuṣ*

[802] Al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb*, 31.
[803] Ibid., 33.

Anṣīṣ' ('The Halfling Boy'), for example, is a well-known Arabic folktale, which tells of a child born as half a boy, who embarks on adventures with his ram companion and manages to defeat his evil older brothers as well as a flesh-eating ghoul.[804] 'Āisha, the protagonist of her second story, is a beautiful young girl, who receives seven scales from a fish, which provide protection from her wicked stepmother's evil schemes.[805]

Both stories, suggesting that honesty and hard work will reap their rewards, stand in sharp contrast to that of Ibn Ādam (the Son of Adam), who 'conquered everything in the world' (*ghalaba kull shay' fī-l-dunyā*), replacing the notion of coming 'home' with that of irrevocable flight and resignation to tyranny.[806] While '*Nuṣ Anṣīṣ*' is a well-known intertext, this tale lies uneasily between the unfamiliar and the only too familiar. Recasting humanity's subjugation of animals in the garb of etiological fable, it does little to sugar-coat it, combining the scope of myth and motifs of fable with harsh, creaturely reality.[807] Returning to 'the land of human and jinn', when Ibn Ādam began to dominate other species through his 'wiliness' (*ḥīla*), it tells of how he failed in the process to become a noble master:[808]

> Ibn Adam, dagger in hand, was in hot pursuit of Bull. Like a flash, he took hold of him and threw him to the ground. But, as he was readying himself to slit Bull's throat, the animal bellowed into his face: 'You have forgotten all the goodness I have given you! And now you plan to be my executioner, devouring my meat, and gobbling my hide and hooves'.[809]

[804] Ibid., 10-19.
[805] Ibid., 44-52.
[806] Ibid., 87.
[807] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 73-4.
[808] Al-Faytūrī, *Sarīb*, 87.
[809] Ibid.

Shocked by the monstrosity of Ibn Ādam, the wild animals send Porcupine to investigate. After much searching, Porcupine locates the culprit, and is invited to stay as his guest. Ibn Ādam first serves him milk from Goat, only to then slaughter Goat's son, Kid, in honour of him. Appalled, Porcupine flees to the other beasts where he refuses to tell his tale until they dig him a deep burrow in which to hide. Having done so, the animals listen to his tale before themselves scattering in fear. Each finds his own refuge in mountain caves or burrows.

Narrating how animals first found their lairs, the tale may be termed a 'just-so story' whose harsh realism nevertheless contrasts the flights of fantasy usually expected of the genre. Animal dens, the story goes, are simply the product of human oppression, while Ibn Ādam is the only flesh-eating ghoul around, and fearful prey have replaced magical animal companions. Concluding her tale, the grandmother then reveals that it is not just the human-animal divide that is in question, but the broader one of predator and prey, regardless of species. After first assuming the animal's perspective in telling her tale, she continues seamlessly into her own memories, identifying with the animal's flight, and using the word 'refuge' (*malja'*) to describe both animal habitats and the bombed building where she shelters after World War Two:

> Since then, all wild beasts have fled, each one choosing a hiding place and refuge (*malja'*). Some retreated to mountain caves, some buried into the ground and some escaped to deserted terrains. They scattered across the land just as we did, settling in Benghazi where hunger had rooted itself, and war had razed everything to the ground. We sought refuge (*malja'*) in a dilapidated building, its walls crumbling.[810]

[810] Ibid., 90.

Shortly after arriving in Benghazi, the grandmother begins to hear the word 'Libya' for the first time on the radio and to see people campaigning for independence in the war-torn streets. She rejoices, but without understanding why, simply trying to survive the manmade and natural obstacles that continue to threaten her existence as the city is shaken by flooding, and the Palestinian *nakba* of 1948 threatens to return her sons to another warzone. Meanwhile, her story of Ibn Ādam, with dagger in hand, serves as a haunting reminder of humanity's first, shared act of violence, and its history, based on the scattering of creatures.

Along with her arrival in Benghazi, the grandmother's broader memories are also woven into the fundamental, creaturely perspective of her final tale. Detailing her flight across the desert from Gharyan to Benghazi during World War Two, fleeing war and starvation with her six young children, they are conveyed in a stream-of-consciousness, in which her narrating voice often merges with that of her former self, made poignantly aware of her own mortality by the trauma of the journey:

> If my children and I truly come from you, Lord, why must we consume other beasts (*hādhihi al-dawābb*) to survive? Why must I consume other life in order to live, obeying the call of the wastelands as my belly hounds me and I hound anything with a belly of its own?[811]

War is personified as a flesh-eating monster, and she, as creature, oscillates between predator and prey, hounding other creatures and also hounded by her own hunger, as she describes how, 'food distracted us from ourselves [...] from every other part of our bodies'.[812] In her reminiscences, she also repeatedly uses the word '*dābba*' (beast/animal), and its plural '*dawābb*', as she describes how the 'Christians in their

[811] Ibid., 38.
[812] Ibid., 34.

tanks attacked every beast' and the Italians planted landmines 'not wanting a single beast to live'.[813] Ultimately, her memories slip into fragmented and nightmarish visions, where the physical vulnerability of the creaturely condition is foregrounded:

> Howling all around. A headless man seeking a sip of water. A naked woman, her hands protecting her young, her lower half gone. Cackling and whispered speech. An Italian, his belly open, running mad and trouserless [...] Everything on fire, everything emerging before me from within the sand.[814]

From her serene courtyard, where 'security' (*amān*) reigns, the grandmother thus increasingly moves into memories of violence and suffering, abandoning fairy tale quests for a story of perpetual flight where the human intrinsically lacks 'trustworthiness' (*lā amān fīhi*).[815]

Within this movement, a particularly poignant moment comes as we learn that the story of Ibn Ādam has profoundly bored her grandson, enraptured by the Greek and Roman legends he learns at school rather than his grandmother's disappointingly creaturely history. As she finishes her story, he rudely demands, 'Who are you talking to grandma?'.[816] The story fails to capture his imagination, which seeks the superhuman and heroic rather than her '*sarīb*', which signifies not just a 'long story' but an 'overly long one', rambling, fractured and with no satisfactory ending.

In the complex entanglement of mythologies and historical references that the memoir brings together, the grandmother's tale may indeed appear simplistic, with its characters, Ibn Ādam, Bull, Goat and Porcupine, named after their species, and its plotline following a basic fact of deep history. Yet its simple creaturely truth, of

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[813] Ibid., 40-41.
[814] Ibid., 42.
[815] Ibid., 31, 87.
[816] Ibid., 91.

consignment to eternal flight, haunts all else, just like the hunger and fear of the grandmother's youth. Meanwhile, in the narrative as a whole, the recovery of her *sarīb* represents a renewed allegiance to oral and creaturely experience, and its incorporation into the older narrator's memoir, after his youthful rejection of it. Both dwelling in memories of childhood harmony and confronting the processes of its loss, the narrator interweaves this inevitable and traumatic process with the collective memory of all underdogs.

Flytopia

In *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, meanwhile, experiences of violence render Hadachinou's grandmother unable to tell stories altogether, as she exclaims to him, 'You always want me to tell you stories, but I only know stories about war and suffering. You'll learn them soon enough from books... or by yourself'.[817] In the broader narrative, this feeling of inability to relay the events of the past may also be traced in the use of a nonhuman narrator in the memoir's sole tale-within-a-tale, entitled 'The Story of the Little Fly of Flies' ('*L'histoire de la petite mouche des mouches*'). Told by Hadachinou's Great Aunt Nafissa, the story simply conveys the memories of a little fly, at some unspecified point in Libyan history, delighting in the war and drought plaguing the land: 'That year, the drought was ravaging the land for our benefit, but there was much more: much to our delight, Homo sapiens went to war against each other. Our tribe had a great deal to do'.[818]

While in *Sarīb* the grandmother's tale banishes the possibility of 'home', Aunt Nafissa's replaces human home with fly home, located in the 'putrefying bodies' of humans.[819] Filled with orifices, excrement and decay, the little fly's story depicts a 'flytopia' where

[817] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 95-6.
[818] Ibid., 93.
[819] Ibid., 92.

human importance is radically undermined, represented as an organic whole and literally seen from the inside out: 'My father liked nostrils best. He would sneak inside them with my older brothers and sisters, and spend ages in there. Sometimes they would have their siesta inside, and they even defecated there [...] Those were feast days'.[820] As darkly disturbing as it is unsettlingly entertaining, the story is said to be Hadachinou's favourite, and told in order to distract Siddéna, his family's sub-Saharan maidservant, from the loss of her family. At the same time, Aunt Nafissa also impresses its seriousness upon them. As she tells them, her stories 'carry in them memories of our countries, particularly the country of women' (*elles portent la mémoire de nos contrées, surtout celles des femmes*).[821]

At first, it is unclear why the fly's history should be related to the 'country of women'. When considered in the light of Hadachinou's grandmother, however, the little fly's tale simply points to the difficulty of telling *human* stories about Libya, and particularly the experience of its women. Provoked by Siddéna's suffering, and emerging from the suffering of women before her, the story both acknowledges this suffering and transforms it into a story that can be told to a child. With its fanciful visions of feasting, 'flytopia' provokes laughter, but also signifies the chronic fracture of human society through the fact that the flies' feast is human in nature. Concluding as the little fly remembers his grandmother telling him 'about the world' as he lay happily replete at night, this universal image of one generation imparting wisdom to another stands in poignant contrast to Hadachinou's own grandmother's inability to relay such wisdom to him.[822]

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[820] Ibid., 93.

[821] Ibid., 92; *La Compagnie des Tripolitaines*, 97.

[822] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 92.

Literally dwelling within human suffering, the 'little fly' becomes a particularly evocative narrator of Benjamin's 'natural history', which, as Pick observes, 'does not merely admit nature as a backdrop or mise-en-scène', but rather, 'reveals nature as what is fundamentally temporal about history – mutability, transience and decay – the passing of the historical into ahuman nature, the passing of man into nonman, of soul into matter'.[823] No creature better reveals the humbleness of human origins, and the inevitability of their return to them, than the fly. As Steven Connor remarks, flies have accompanied humans throughout history, flourishing on civilisation's violence, waste and decline, and highlighting the carnage that humans elevate through ideology and legend.[824] As he puts it, they represent humans' 'constant fellow-traveller and provoking other [...] our familiar-stranger, our dis-similar'.[825]

This defamiliarizing perspective, while strikingly conveyed by Aunt Nafissa's '*petite mouche*', emerges in yet more unsettling form in the narrative's other 'fly extract', the lengthy opening epigraph from the fictional 'Book of Flies' (*Livre des mouches*). Relaying the history of the land of Libya from before the arrival of the Phoenicians, it moves from the homely, folkloric voice of the 'little fly' to the official discourse of a 'fly nation' and dispassionate tone of a historian. Similarly, it shifts from the microscopic view of nostrils and eyeballs to the panoramic view of eras. Combining mythic, colonial and pseudo-scientific discourses, the fly describes Libya's 'indigenous inhabitants' as 'savage, hairy, toothless barbarians', 'cannibals', 'Cyclops', 'pygmies' and 'hermaphrodites', blurring human and animal, and real and fantastic. Reference is also made to the people's 'monkey neighbours' and to 'Homo sapiens from other continents', opening onto a yet broader view of human and animal history, whose

[823] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 74.
[824] Steven Connor, *Fly* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 7.
[825] Ibid.

hybridity upsets straightforward notions of nation and of a land's 'original inhabitants'.[826]

Relayed not by a bona fide historian but a fictional, 'fly' perspective, fracture and decay are also implicit within the extract. On one level, the 'Book of Flies' and 'Free Nation of Flies' may be read as straightforward parodies of nation, mimicking Gaddafi's *Green Book* and *Jamāhiriyya*. At the same time, the nature of the allegory also moves beyond the satirical into more discomforting visions. Flies are, after all, no typical allegory for human society. Unlike ants and bees, they have no swarm mentality through which to explore the workings of civilisation.[827] They also thrive on decomposition, a fact which must surely make them a locus of existential angst rather than political allegory. The 'Book of Flies' indeed provides a view of human history whose allegorical dimensions are undermined by the fact that, at its heart, the chronicler's chief concern is feasting on human flesh, evident in the way the extract is concluded: 'Ever since, there has been an endless procession of death, destruction and invasion in the land, much to the delight of the Free Nation of the Flies'.[828] Above all, the extract serves as a reminder that, unlike all the peoples that have occupied Libya, flies have remained constant, undermining the fleeting ideologies of empire, and serving as a reminder that the root and destiny of all people is brute matter, no matter the artificial barriers that they place between themselves.

In addition, the *Book of Flies* further introduces the motif of primordial betrayal that emerges in the memoir, connected to other strands of memory, and underlying all visions of violence. Women, the fly reports, were originally the 'warriors' and 'hunters'

[826] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 9.
[827] Connor, *Fly*, 92.
[828] Ben Hameda, *Under the Tripoli Sky*, 11.

while men guarded the children.[829] Growing bored, the men venture to the coast where they encounter the Phoenicians, arriving by sea. Tempting the men with delicacies and alcohol, the Phoenicians establish trading posts, bringing the curse of gold to the land. The men renounce their prophetess, Maboulah, and submit to the foreigners, relegating women to 'bellies into which they emptied their desires'.[830] This original betrayal, the fly reports, marks the beginning of Libya's colonial history as, dying, the prophetess Maboulah, curses the men and their descendants: 'You will be damned until the end of time. Other men will come to humiliate and enslave you. You will only ever be slaves and the sons of criminals'.[831]

Throughout the rest of the memoir, primordial tales of women's exile and betrayal form a recurring motif, through which the gender divide is transformed into one of species. Fella, Hadachinou's Jewish neighbour claims to be an angel, immersed in a state of mystical love for the Divine who rejects her all-encompassing passion in favour of humans, 'made of clay and filth'.[832] Dissociating herself from the elements of human creation in Abrahamic tradition, Fella incorporates all women into the category of unwitting angels:

> Your mother and the others are angels too', she said, 'But angels who don't know it. Their punishment is to have forgotten because they deserted God when they realised he was a male god and all he was interested in was his prick and his belly, like all men, his faithful creatures.[833]

Tibra, a Berber, claims descent from the once powerful Amazons of the Sahara: 'I'm from a different species, a wilder, more ancient creature. Like all women (even if some

[829] Ibid.
[830] Ibid.
[831] Ibid.
[832] Ibid., 78.
[833] Ibid., 80.

have forgotten it), I'm directly descended from the Amazons, the warrior goddesses promised to the wind and wedded to the Infinite'.[834] Finally, the sorcerer, Hadja Kimya, of Sub-Saharan descent, imagines herself 'born before time, born of a sugary flower the colour of silk', and further portrays herself as a force of both creation and apocalypse, directed exclusively against men:

> I am Kimya, the woman from the end of time that will soon come for all men [...] in my vagina lies the secret of the universe and from my breath whole worlds are born and wonders, dreams and wind.[835]

From the 'wind' to a 'sugary flower', and from the 'infinite' to a time 'before time', the stories represent alternative genealogies, dissociating women from both men and humanity, and immersed in the elemental and mystical. Following in quick succession, they also shortly precede 'The Story of the Little Fly', with its own reference to the 'country of women'. The disparity between it and them initially appears striking, rendered more so by the fact that Aunt Nafissa laughs and mocks Hadja Kimya's prophetic words, while Hadja Kimya derides her earthy tale. Contrasting fly paradise to paradise lost and materiality to mythology, the stories are, however, only superficially at odds, with all similarly revealing a need to imagine history through nonhuman eyes or alternative origins, while also accepting the alienation and suffering inherent to it.

In the memoir's final reference to origins, meanwhile, Aunt Nafissa tells Hadachinou that no one can truly know their origins, and these origins should therefore be sought only in the eyes of others, so long as those eyes are not clouded by 'illusion':

> You come in through my eyes, travelling through my kingdom, my gardens, my labyrinths, then you come through my mouth, you emerge, soft kisses...

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[834] Ibid., 85.

[835] Ibid., 89.

> Another person's eyes are your origins and your kingdom. But these other people can't see *you* if they're blinded by their search for an illusion, for the Invisible One.[836]

Like her fly story, Aunt Nafissa's words are grounded in the physical encounter of human bodies. Suggesting that answers must be sought on a small scale, within the microcosm of each human, it recognises the alterity of each individual and the many universes they conceal, but also the fact that, deep down and far into history, they are united.

For Ben Hameda, this attitude alone can allow humanity to recover its unity, as he elsewhere expresses:

> Will these descendants of the *Libous*, along with all the other peoples inhabiting this 'Arab space', living in an '*allahlogical*' time, be able to build bridges to their neighbours in the North, living in their so-called post-ideological time, and create a shared time, that of the human in its diversity and complexity [...]?

Through his fly narrators and female cosmologies, Ben Hameda both critiques accepted accounts of human origins, history and progress, and paves the way for visions of shared humanity, in which embrace of otherness is central and historical rifts repaired. As in *Sarīb*, the resultant 'creaturely history' emerges as a way of making communicable experiences of vulnerability, and bearing witness to the violence of civilisation, dating back to primordial moments of subjugation. Like *Sarīb*, it represents not 'coming-of-age', but a pledge of allegiance to circular, messy history, manifest in its cosmic magnitude, discursive diversity and physical simplicity. In both, this history is expressed through the merging of voices, memories and imaginings.

[836] Ibid., 99.

In both, the plight of the narrators is also left open and ambivalent, once again frustrating straightforward notions of home. In *Sarīb*, the narrative perspective moves, for the first time, from the voice of the young protagonist and his grandmother in order to depict his disappearance during a patriotic school parade. A terrible storm arises and the memoir ends as birds return to their nests, dogs and cats huddle on piles of rubbish, and there is no sign of the boy: 'police cars trawled the streets, and no one came, and there was no news of the missing boy (*al-ghā'ib*)'.[837] *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, meanwhile, concludes with Hadachinou returning from his wanders through the city, and listening to one of his aunt's tell him the same circling rhyme which begins the novella, '*Seven girls inside a flute. The ghoul twirls and twirls and eats one of the girls. Six girls inside a flute...*'[838] Ending with disappearance and circularity, the open-endedness of oral, creaturely history is thus maintained until the very last.

First People and Unborn People: Visions of Eden and the Womb

In Najwā Bin Shatwān's *Wabr al-aḥṣina* (2006; *The Horses' Hair*), the perspective of the child, moving into adulthood, shifts to that of an unborn child, characteristic of the author's often defamiliarizing fictional narrators, discussed in Chapter One. Described as 'Texts concerning Creation and Growth' (*Nuṣūṣ fī-l-takwīn wa-l-nash'a*), *Wabr al-aḥṣina* consists of two poems and a series of six stories, depicting the lineage of a Libyan family, stretching from the unborn child, in the 1950s, back to Adam and Eve. Combining modern social contexts, deep historical perspectives and myth, the texts move from a panoramic vision of humanity to a microscopic examination of the body's genetic make-up. Through both, Libya's harsh social conditions, and particularly those of its women, are explored. Issues of 'humanity' and 'animality' are also raised through the formation of the 'pre-human' child, representing an intriguing variation on the

[837] Ibid., 126-127.
[838] Ibid., 13.

etiological fables discussed. A slight diversion from my main focus on animals, the child offers an alternative perspective on the creaturely condition, while the first four texts set the tone for its primordial narrative, introducing the 'pre-human' perspective through that of the 'first humans'.

The first of these texts is an Arabic translation of 'This Be The Verse' (1971) by Philip Larkin (1922-1985):

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were soppy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can,
And don't have any kids yourself.[839]

Identifying 'misery' at the heart of human lineage, Larkin's poem is followed by a satirical rewriting of Adam and Eve through the contexts of modern Libyan society, entitled '*Mustakhraj rasmī min sijil wāqi'a wilādat rabb al-'ā'ila*' (Official Extract from the Record of the Patriarch's Birth). Concerning the marriage of the first humans, the text

[839] Philip Larkin, 'This Be The Verse,' in *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin*, ed. Archie Burnett (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 88.

opens with satirical questions: 'What kind of car brought the couple? Who received the good news about the bride's virginity and, indeed, the groom's, since Adam knew no woman before or after Eve?'.[840] Following the wedding, Adam is then spared the costs of the '*zūra*', the first visit a new bride makes to her family. Eve, however, regrets having no-one to prepare traditional remedies for her and her children after giving birth.[841] Later, one of these children is also said to be struck by the 'friendly eye' (*'ayn al-wadūd*), since jealousy was not known at the time.[842] Through these and other references, Libyan family traditions are indicated through their absence, and set against the primordial human condition, moving inevitably towards loneliness and conflict: 'Adam could not manage to stifle the icy feeling that crouched over him, and began to complain constantly about the misery of life. Eve attributed this to his loneliness (*waḥda*)'.[843]

As Adam and Eve's family rapidly extends, discord soon breaks out when one of their sons kills his brother in jealousy over his wife, their sister. As he does so, he is watched over by a 'dusty, lame raven', echoing the Qur'ānic account of Cain and Abel, in which the bird teaches Cain to bury Abel.[844] Despite the primal nature of the act, and the mythic imagery surrounding it, the language describing the strife that causes it, and results from it, is also anchored in modern political rhetoric, referred to as 'factionalism' (*al-taḥazzub*) and 'partisanship' (*al-tashayyu'*).[845] Stemming from this act, Adam and Eve's offspring then descend into violence and oppression, with men killed and women taken as slaves. In a particularly despairing comment on humanity, Eve sorely regrets not taking a contraceptive pill, while Adam wishes he had been born

[840] Bin Shatwān, *Wabr al-aḥṣina*, 8.
[841] Ibid., 9.
[842] Ibid., 9.
[843] Ibid., 11.
[844] Ibid., 14; Qur'ān 5:31.
[845] Bin Shatwān, *Wabr al-aḥṣina*, 13.

sterile.[846] The passage concludes by relating what has gone before to both the context of Libya, and of humanity as a whole:

> Since then, fraternal enmity (*ḥādithat 'irāk al-ikhwa*) has been relayed in over a hundred different ways, in every tongue. In Libya, we have our own particular way of managing conflicts (*idārat khilāfātinā*), and are famous and celebrated for it among all other humans: we declare our hero to be right in all cases, without so much as a discussion, or even a scratch of the head, and regardless of whether he is the victim or perpetrator.[847]

In the third 'text', '*Ḥā' min nasl Ḥamad*' ('Ḥā' from the line of Ḥamad'), the Qur'ānic raven returns, and is depicted circling over men in an unspecified period of history as they kill and bury their daughters. The root *w-'-d*, signifying the practice of burying alive female babies, appears through description of 'the ground sated with the decomposed bodies of buried girls' (*jusūm al-maw'ūdāt al-mutaḥallala*).[848] Before the invention of axes, the men are described digging the girls' graves with their bare hands, seeking to distance 'shame' (*'ār*) from themselves, and sparing only a few 'for mating and pleasure' (*li-l-tanāsul wa-l-istimtā'*).[849] Further, the girls' burial is linked to the formation of 'the largest land oil deposit on the face of the earth', tying Libya's oil reserves into both a deep historical perspective and a biting social critique of the historical abuse of women.[850]

From this mass slaughter, one girl, referred to as a 'Ḥā'' – echoing Ḥawā' (Eve) – escapes to become the distant ancestor of Ḥamad, the first protagonist of the next text,

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[846] Ibid., 15.
[847] Ibid., 16.
[848] Ibid., 20.
[849] Ibid., 19.
[850] Ibid., 20.

'*Sīn min nasl Ḥamad*' (Sīn from the line of Ḥamad). Taking place after the 'fourth flood' (*al-ṭūfān al-rābiʿ*), against the broader context of Ottoman rule and Bedouin rebellion, it relates the marriage of Ḥamad to Aḥwaywa, and the subsequent adventures of their son, Ḥusayn. Ḥusayn, meanwhile, represents the distant ancestor of the unborn child who narrates the subsequent texts, extending the family's genealogy from myth and history into visions imagined through the creaturely condition of the human body.

In '*al-Maʿbar*', the first of these texts, the harshness of life in Libya means that the child's conception is delayed by its father's exhaustion. Described as one among many 'ants', this father is part of a team building a highway from Fazzan to Ajdabiyya in order to join 'the nation to the people and the people to the nation'.[851] While waiting to become a lifeform, the child discusses with other unconceived babies the possible reasons for the delay, worrying that perhaps their mothers' tough lives will render them unable to bare new life altogether. Their collective wait is, furthermore, paralleled to that of the Libyan people as a whole, awaiting a revolution that will lift them from injustice, poverty and hunger.[852] As the children discuss their futures, they learn that, in Libya, their childhoods will be short or non-existent, in a poverty-stricken nation 'still struggling to manage its affairs'.[853] Forming queues, along with the other children of the world, they are divided into those destined for a life of luxury or one of labour.

In '*Faḍā' al-salsūl*', the child finally enters the body of its father, perceiving its ancestors on the walls of a dark tunnel:

[851] Ibid., 35.
[852] Ibid., 37.
[853] Ibid., 48.

> Inside were secrets and events, frozen in place since the depths of time (*al-māḍī al-saḥīq*) [...] Here, I was able to see the plasma of millions of humans, from a time unknown to all but the King of Time, the One who decides the course of events.[854]

The 'cells of ancestors and their nuclei' line the passages of the body, and the child perceives its future in the past of its ancestors: 'these people have planted the seeds of my being, formed in the flesh and the blood, the body and the spirit, the mind and emotion' (*takwīnī al-damawī wa-l-laḥmī, al-nafsī wa-l-jasadī, al-'aqlī wa-l-tarawwu'ī*).[855] While in the father's body, it watches the drama of its ancestors' lives unspool, but, before seeing all, is swept off on a new journey: 'My animal (*ḥayawānī*) came hastily to sweep me away, before I had completed my tour through the corridors of past events'.[856]

The child's transformation into a sperm is described as 'the moment of my animalization' (*laḥẓat ḥaywanatī*) and the sperm repeatedly described as 'my animal' (*ḥayawānī*), with 'a tapered head like an arrow'.[857] The sperm, the narrator comments, will develop into 'the only animal that cannot be tamed at the zoo [...], an amphibious animal, predatory and tame (*muftaris wa-alīf*), capable of being raised anywhere [...] effusive and compatible with all circumstances'.[858] Embracing this animal origin, the child declares that, when later in life it is called an 'animal' by a teacher at school, it will feel only a 'human delight... as though she was praising my ancient heritage, just like the pre-Islamic poets'.[859] Linking together both evolutionary and mythic visions of

[854] Ibid., 54.
[855] Ibid.
[856] Ibid., 67.
[857] Ibid., 67.
[858] Ibid., 71-72.
[859] Ibid., 72.

the human-animal divide, the child further describes its 'animalization' as proof of the veracity of both the totemic beliefs of its ancestors, *Banī kalb* (Sons of Dog) and *Banī asad* (Sons of Lion), and the 'Darwinisation of Humans' (*darwanat al-ādamiyīn*).[860]

Finally, in '*Wabr al-aḥṣina*', the narrator, a girl, arrives in her mother's body. While there, she is able to witness her mother, 'Awaysha's, life as a young girl, and how she came to be married to the child's father. She also discovers the genes responsible for 'wolfication' (*al-ta'adhdhub*), and the need to have a 'share of evil' in order to enter the world.[861] Above all, however, she is introduced to the hardship she will suffer as a female in Libya, experiencing the difficult life of her pregnant mother, during her nine months inside her: 'My carrier is tired, and I am too. All day she has been working like a mule, with no one taking pity on her'.[862]

Eventually, the baby girl is pulled from her mother's belly, screaming not to be brought into the world: 'I wanted to return to where it was better, where I would not be transformed into what I did not want to be, where everything was fresh like clay (*ṭāzij ka-l-ṣalṣāl*), and could be changed, wiped away or reformed'.[863] As she is finally brought into the world, however, complications in the labour lead to the death of both her and her mother:

> My mother took me or I took her. For the first and last time in her life she was able to see that her husband did not seek her departure (*raḥīlahā*), that he was clinging to her survival, gathering her children together and praying for her

[860] Ibid., 72.
[861] Ibid., 129.
[862] Ibid., 101.
[863] Ibid., 184.

survival. But she did not respond, for she had gone with me to the world from which I had come to her.[864]

Through both the 'first humans', Adam and Eve, and the 'unborn' narrator, Bin Shatwān transforms Eden and the womb, preeminent symbols of human innocence, into scenes of alienation and hardship, observed on a social, biological and mythical level. The formation of humanity, nation and child are also interwoven, shifting, in a manner similar to the 'fly stories' of *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, between panoramic perspectives and uncomfortably organic ones. The last text, '*Farāgh al-imtilā*" ('The Emptiness of Filling'), duly moves back from the child's voice to a broad vision of human violence and dispersal:

Ever since Cain killed Abel
and the raven got involved,
the comedy has developed
with knives and axes,
poison and rifles,
bombs, gases
and bacteria...
The Earth did not become
a tiered cake
and life did not miss a trick
in preserving those who will beget us.
They poured forth as it was emptied
and it became full.[865]

[864] Ibid., 185.
[865] Ibid., 187.

Seen in a profoundly negative light, the scriptural act of human 'dispersal', rendered through the term 'filling' (*imtilā'*), is, as in Larkin's opening poem, imagined as a process of passing on violence in ever more sophisticated forms. In each text of *Wabr al-aḥṣina*, this generational process is envisioned in different manners, with its inevitability conveyed through myth, genetics and social custom, a tangle of circumstances in which the unborn child is reluctant to participate. Mention of the 'raven', meanwhile, provides a fitting place to move to discussion of al-Kūnī, whose own rewriting of the Cain-Abel narrative incorporates a *waddān*, as victim rather than witness of humanity's journey from the deep past into modernity.

The Ancient and Animal: Rewriting, Remembering and the Possibility of Return

Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's writing is rooted not just in the Sahara, but the Sahara of the deep and mythic past, where he explores the origins and history of the Tuareg people, whose heritage and origins remain clouded in legend and academic hypothesis.[866] Preserving this little known heritage, and exploring its diversity and plurality, are, as Hartmut Fähndrich observes, the principal drives behind al-Kūnī's work:

> He has called it his self-imposed task to represent the thoughts and feelings of the Tuareg and preserve this for posterity, to hand down their myths and their tales; and he is acutely aware that it is high time to document what once was, for the traditional nomadic way of life of the Tuareg is doomed to disappear.[867]

As Fähndrich further remarks, 'A journey with Ibrahim al-Koni through "his" desert, the region of his childhood and youth, is a journey into the past; his personal past and that of his people'.[868] It is also, however, a journey into the past of humanity. For al-

[866] For a discussion of different hypotheses concerning these origins, see: al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Muḥarramāt*, 103-4.
[867] Fähndrich, 'The Desert,' 334.
[868] Ibid., 339.

Kūnī, the Sahara, in addition to being an allegory for existence, is also the place where he believes human society began, before its subsequent global dispersal.

The author's six-volume history, *Bayān fī lughat al-lāhūt* (2005; *A Treatise on the Language of Divinity*), elaborates this vision, focussing on the 'primitive language' (*al-lisān al-bad'ī*) of the Sahara's first human inhabitants, its religious dimensions, and how it interacted with ancient Egyptian and Sumerian tongues.[869] Within this monosyllabic language, al-Kūnī locates the 'genius of the ancient people' (*'abqariyat al-awallīn*) and the secrets of human life, which still linger in modern-day Tamazight.[870] In his fictional work, too, he frequently refers to these 'ancient people', their 'secrets' and 'genius', attributing to this marginalised, nomadic community a central importance within the metaphysical condition of humanity.

Looking back, rather than forward, to a vision of the human ideal, he moves yet further into the geographically, chronologically and epistemologically marginalised by extending this vision to animals, placing them at the heart of existence, its creation and narration. As Mīrāl al-Ṭaḥāwī remarks, his work is haunted by longing for the 'childhood of humanity' (*ṭufūlat al-bashar*) and the 'paradise of animal nature' (*fardūs al-ṭabī'a al-ḥayawāniyya*).[871] Most often, this 'paradise lost' is located in the mythical *Wāw*, a utopic oasis rediscovered only through a life of desert wandering. Above all, metaphysical understanding therefore necessitates a search for what has been forgotten, and almost all of al-Kūnī's work is haunted by primordial moments of creation and fall. As Ziad Elmarsafy puts it, 'it is precisely as a maker of fictional worlds

[869] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Bayān fī lughat al-lāhūt: lughz al-Ṭawāriq yakshif lughzay al-Farā'ina wa-l-Sūmar* (Beirut: Dār al-Multaqā, 2004), 7.
[870] Al-Kūnī, *Bayān: lughz al-Ṭawāriq*, 16.
[871] Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Muḥarramāt*, 191, 193.

that Al-Koni teaches, or rather narrates and recites, the entities, laws and values of the world to the reader'.[872]

Al-Kūnī, in fact, goes further, placing his reader in a fictional world where numerous narratives function, both within his works and between them, encouraging the reader to compare, contrast and interpret often contradictory accounts. Through this approach, he suggests both that all versions of creation are valid but also that none is sufficient. Memory, after all, is an elusive process, and, as it struggles towards truth, repetition and reconfiguration become necessities. Dismantling metanarratives from different world traditions, al-Kūnī combines paradigmatic scenes, transforming his work into a fragmented mosaic through which Truth can be glimpsed. At the same time, he also evokes the sense of never being able to go far enough back into the deep past. *Anūbīs* (2004, *Anubis*), for example, recounts the story of the first ancestor of the Tuareg people, paralleled to Adam through citations from Genesis at the beginning of several chapters.[873] At the same time, Anūbīs himself is also fixated on the even deeper past and the wisdom of his own ancestors.[874]

Behind this vibrant plurality, is, of course, an accompanying sense of mystical unity, which Rima Sleiman views as the central impulse of al-Kūnī's fiction, representing a 'negation of creation' and 'rewriting of Genesis', moving towards 'nothingness'.[875] While evoking mystical and transcendent 'nothingness', however, al-Kūnī's work also remains rooted in multiplicity, embodied by the desert's organic lifeforms. Alongside his multi-volume oeuvres, some of al-Kūnī's most striking pieces are his shorter ones,

[872] Elmarsafy, *Sufism*, 108.
[873] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *Anūbīs* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2002), 13, 69.
[874] Ibid., 92.
[875] Rima Sleiman, 'Ville, oasis, desert: La négation de la Création,' in *La poétique de l'espace dans la literature arabe moderne*, ed. Boutros Hallaq, Robin Ostle and Stefan Wild (Paris: Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 44.

depicting a truffle's birth or the lifecycle of a lizard, and placing them within a broader cosmic scheme, of which they are both part and microcosm.[876] Nature, as Fähndrich comments, represents a record in al-Kūnī's writing:

> Supported by the wind, they (the stones) also sing eternity's song and serve as its notebook, into which the history of past generations is inscribed. But men neither hear nor understand it. Ibrahim al-Koni's literary work tries to help them overcome this deficiency.[877]

Desert animals, in particular, represent a record of things forgotten, while also serving more critical and challenging purposes, replacing accepted human meaning with disruptive animal meaning. In many of al-Kūnī's novels, they oust humans from the pinnacle of creation, or suffer primordial acts of violence at their hands, provoking fall, forgetting and alienation. In *Anūbīs*, for example, the protagonist is expelled from paradise after compulsively consuming the meat of a dying animal.[878] In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, in a story told by Asūf's father, humanity is recast as the 'enemy of all creatures', created solely to prevent warring between gazelles and *waddān*.[879] Finally, in '*al-Fakhkh*' (1991; 'The Trap'), the desert is depicted as a harmonious symbiosis of animals and jinn, destroyed by the arrival of rapacious humans.[880]

Only through becoming like animals, or being inspired by them, can humans hope to remember and preserve the covenants which maintain harmony in the desert. Animals, therefore, become crucially linked to the ancient. Above all, they are central to al-Kūnī's rewriting of traditional myths, in which they act as a foil to the discord

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[876] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī '*Mawlid al-tirfās*,' in *al-Qafaṣ*, 9-18 (London: Riad El-Rayyes Books, 1990); '*al-Ḍabb fī-l-khurūj al-awwal*,' in *Dīwān al-nathr al-barrī*, 187-194 (Limassol: Dār al-Tanwīr li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1991).
[877] Fähndrick, 'The Desert,' 340.
[878] Al-Kūnī, *Anūbīs*, 80-83.
[879] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 31-2.
[880] Al-Kūnī, '*al-Fakhkh*,' 47.

that humans have caused, and the cycles of violence they have provoked. As Sperl indicates, al-Kūnī's work portrays the 'experiment of civilisation' as 'deeply flawed', and marked by an 'empire complex' of ideology and despotism.[881] Cain exemplifies this 'complex' through his act of fratricide, reworked in ever-changing dynamics in al-Kūnī's fiction. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, the story is powerfully rewritten through the drama of humanity's subjugation of other species. Alongside visions of survival and spirituality, discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the novel is, therefore, also an apt illustration of the deep historical impulse of al-Kūnī's fiction, interweaving myth and animal voices.

Cain, Abel – Human, Animal

As Ricardo Quinones remarks, the Cain-Abel narrative, one of the most familiar narratives of human fall, has migrated across the world's literatures, with Cain, rather than Adam and Eve, coming to be envisioned as the true patron of evil in the world.[882] The narrative, Quinones suggests, represents a 'shattering reminder of the fragility of the human compact', serving to address a 'breach in existence, a fracture at the heart of things'.[883] It also, he observes, 'reveals an encounter with the lost brother, the sacrificed other, who must be gone but who can never be gone'.[884] In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, through Cain's final slaughter of Asūf, 'fracture' and the 'lost brother' are powerfully imagined through animals, bringing together the mythologies and species that have, throughout the novel, been entangled.

From the first, Cain and Asūf's names indicate how al-Kūnī weaves plurality into the Cain-Abel narrative, and transforms it into a paradigmatic encounter of civilisation

[881] Sperl, '"The Lunar Eclipse",' 242.
[882] Ricardo Quinones, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.
[883] Ibid., 3.
[884] Ibid.

and wilderness. Cain's name, 'Cain/Qābīl', explicitly refers to the scriptural character in Genesis and the Qur'an. The first murderer, Cain is, in Genesis, also a builder of cities, and, as Quinones puts it, 'aspires to possession, to rights, to identity', while Abel is 'the figure of the right-thinking man who knows he is a stranger and a sojourner among earthly things'.[885] In al-Kūnī's work, Cain, indeed, represents civilisation at its worst, seeking, as examined in Chapter Three, to lay claim to the life and essence of other creatures.

'Asūf', meanwhile, represents a central concept in Tuareg cosmology, often transliterated as '*essuf*'. As Susan Rasmussen remarks, *essuf* signifies abandoned spaces and feelings of loneliness, nostalgia and madness, contrasted to '*ehan*', signifying homeliness and domestication.[886] The Tuareg, according to Dominique Casajus, live in particular fear of the *kel essuf*, unseen spirits who have the power to send humans mad, and to whom children are especially vulnerable.[887] With this in mind, it is certainly striking that Asūf should be named after them, indicating how his father embraces the unseen and nonhuman over human domestication. Asūf, himself, lives in fear of other humans. As al-Ghānamī comments, he represents a vision of the 'childhood of humanity', grounded in his affiliation with animals and the jinn, who, in al-Kūnī's work, are synonymous with the *kel essuf*.[888]

Through Cain, the embodiment of modern civilisation, and Asūf, a goat herder like Abel, al-Kūnī depicts what he interprets as the primordial, deep historical divide between settled and nomadic peoples. While the former, exemplified by Cain, seek 'property' (*al-milkiyya*), and are driven by 'relationships' (*al-'alāqa*), 'ideology' (*al-*

[885] Ibid., 26-7.
[886] Susan Rasmussen, 'The People of Solitude: recalling and reinventing *essuf* (the wild) in traditional and emergent Tuareg cultural spaces,' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): 610.
[887] Casajus, *La tente*, 279.
[888] Al-Ghānamī, *Malḥamat*, 97.

īdiyyūlūjiyyā) and 'reason' (*al-'aql*), the latter, embodied by Abel, seek 'freedom' (*al-ḥurriyya*) and 'revelation' (*al-tajallī*), and are driven by 'solitude' (*al-'uzla*), 'mythology' (*al-mīthūlūjiyyā*) and 'belief' (*al-īmān*).[889] While Abel is accepted by the divine, Cain is shunned, leading to his first act of violence. Abel, meanwhile, represents the first martyr, followed by a long list of other nomadic saints and prophets, to which both Asūf and the *waddān* belong.

Alongside the characters' names, the juxtapositions of civilisation and wilderness, and human and animal are also central to the novel's opening epigraphs, in which Qur'ān 6:38 and Genesis 4:8-12 are juxtaposed:

> There is no creature that crawls on the face of the earth, no bird on the wing, but they are nations like you (*umamun amthālakum*).[890]

> While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's keeper?' The Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.[891]

Epigraphs at the beginnings of al-Kūnī's work are a common feature, foregrounding themes that run through his novels. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, through the simple act of juxtaposing the Qur'ān and Genesis, one of the most famous narratives of human fall

[889] This material is taken from a lecture, 'Vagabond Homelands', given by al-Kūnī at Christchurch College, Oxford, May 14, 2015. Those wishing to consult it should contact me for further details.
[890] Trans. Tarif Khalidi.
[891] Gen. 4: 8-12, New International Version.

and foundation becomes just one story among many, from one species – or 'nation' – among many. Animals, meanwhile, clearly move beyond the passively named and sacrificed of scripture.

As seen in Chapter Four, the *waddān* is, throughout the novel, linked to Asūf through mythical, mystical and creaturely perspectives, while also being tied to the deep past. Asūf, for example, ponders the 'bonds, ancient and inscrutable' (*'alāqa ghāmiḍa wa-qadīma*) that link him and his father to the *waddān*, and, in a footnote, it is defined as 'the oldest animal in the greater Sahara, a mountain goat which became extinct in Europe in the seventeenth century'.[892] Through the playful altering of epigraphs, a common practice in al-Kūnī's work, as John Rossetti notes, the animal is further woven into history.[893] A quote from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, for example, likens Oedipus to a *waddān* rather than the bull of the original. Another quote from Henri Lhote's *A la découverte des fresques du Tassili* (1958; *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes*) is translated in such a way as to emphasise hunters' ritual mimicking of the *waddān*, expressed in the original through reference to them as '*sautillant*' (hopping/skipping).[894] In the first Arabic translation of Lhote, published in 1967, Anīs Zakī Ḥasan translates this as '*qāfizīn*' (springing/bounding).[895] In al-Kūnī's more creative rendition, it becomes '*yataqāfaz 'alā arba'*' ('bounding on all fours'), echoing Asūf's pursuit of the animal, discussed in Chapter Four.[896]

Tracing the *waddān's* origins back to the beginnings of time, while also upsetting familiar histories through it, al-Kūnī places the elusive animal at the centre of

[892] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 54, 8.
[893] John Rossetti, 'Darkness in the Desert: Tradition and Transgression in Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's *'Ushb al-Layl*',' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42 (2011): 51.
[894] Henri Lhote, *A la découverte des fresques du Tassili* (Paris: Arthaud, 1973), 134.
[895] Anīs Zakī Ḥasan, trans., *Lawḥāt Tāsilī*, by Henri Lhote (Tripoli: Maktabat al-Firjānī, 1967), 154.
[896] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 33.

meaning, and renders the species' current overhunting all the more poignant. Through a giant, prehistoric mural of a priest and *waddān*, the animal also becomes central to Cain's final slaughter of Asūf. On the mural, the equality of *waddān* and priest are emphasised: 'His hand touched the *waddān* that stood there alongside him, its air both dignified and stubborn, its head raised, like the priest's, toward the far horizon where the sun rose to pour its rays each day on their faces'.[897] This vision, of sacred and dignified union between human and animal, is brutally juxtaposed to the novel's concluding scene, in which Cain slaughters Asūf on the painting. With his brutality opposed to all that is ancient and nonhuman, the slaughter represents a final way in which recognised mythologies are interrupted through animal presences, and human violence is unveiled.

Paving the way for this scene, Cain's rapaciousness is, as seen in Chapter Three, primarily characterised not by his persecution of humans, but animals. On several occasions, his eradication of desert species emerges as a poignant vision of modern, human fall:

> In those years the Hamada had teemed with life, and there were herds of gazelles everywhere [...] The plains would turn green in the spring, the birds and rabbits and gazelles would flourish – if you chanced, suddenly, to look over the upper plains, you'd be greeted by the sight of the most beautiful of creatures peacefully grazing [...] The moment they sensed the movement of humans, they'd up and flee, and, as they ran off all together, the whole plain would seem to move. Yes, the very desert seemed to be flying human attack.[898]

[897] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 2.
[898] Ibid., 86.

In further echoes and inversions of the Cain-Abel narrative, Cain's slaughter of the gazelle, discussed in Chapter Three, is also portrayed as an act of sororicide, eerily pre-empting his killing of Asūf, in which fratricide and animal slaughter again become entangled. Even before this act, Cain has a dream in which his consumption of a living *waddān* transforms into cannibalism. Riding on the back of a *waddān*, he is driven by hunger to begin eating it, before watching as it transforms into Asūf: 'The beast climbed to a high mountain peak, and Cain found he was sitting, now, on the back of a wretched man he didn't know, a tall, gaunt man whose neck dripped with blood'.[899]

During the slaughter itself Asūf's body merges with that of the *waddān* beneath him, and his self-sacrificial blood brings rain to the desert, revealing an apocalyptic prophecy on the rock, as discussed in Chapter Four. While Jehan Fouad and Saeed Alwakeel suggest that Asūf represents both Abel and the priest on the painting, he therefore also represents both Abel's sacrificial goat and the *waddān* of the painting.[900] With Cain both crucifying him and cutting his throat he simultaneously dramatises saintly martyrdom and animal slaughter: 'Taking hold of the beard, he passed the knife over Asouf's neck in the manner of one well used to slaughter, one who'd slaughtered all the herds of gazelles in the Red Hamada'.[901]

Juxtaposed to the mythic layers the novel brings together, Asūf is slain in a swift, unthinking manner. Even after being beheaded, however, he continues to voice the second of the prophecies that conclude the novel. Prompted by Cain's violence, this prophecy becomes his sole refrain during the last seven chapters of the novel: 'Only through dust will the son of Adam be filled (*lan yashba' Ibn Ādam illā bi-l-turāb*)'.[902]

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[899] Ibid., 129.

[900] Fouad and Alwakeel, 'Representations,' 47.

[901] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 134.

[902] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 129; *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 117.

Through this simple sentence, Asūf condemns the unstoppable greed of humanity, and its endless history of bloodshed. The prophecy also echoes an earlier one made by a soothsayer concerning the infant Cain: 'Cain, son of Adam [...] you will never have your fill of meat (*laḥm*), or of blood, until you eat from Adam's flesh (*laḥm*) and drink from Adam's blood'.[903] In Arabic, the syntax of both prophecies is closer than the English, with the same form and tense of the verb (*lan yashba'/lan tashba'*) rendering 'your fill' and 'be filled'.[904] When uttered by Asūf's severed head, the words also echo the opening verse from Genesis, 'thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground', further revealing his death as a testimony against humanity. Referring to 'Ibn Ādam' as though to a different species, Asūf renounces his human origins, and, through reference to *turāb*, echoing *laḥm*, simultaneously evokes the humbleness of those origins, and their place within a larger whole. The Cain-Abel narrative thus takes on both critical and mystical perspectives, reorienting human centrality within cosmic paradigms.

As seen in Bin Shatwān's *Wabr al-aḥṣina*, al-Kūnī is not alone among Libyan authors in rethinking the narrative, and, like him, 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl even does so through the central presence of an animal, adopting the perspective of the Qur'ānic raven in his short story '*al-Saw'a*' (2005; '*Shame*').[905] Beginning with the bird's illegible caw (*ghāq... ghāq... ghāq...*), as it hovers over the countryside, the story conveys its increasing unease, concluding as it witnesses the murder of one brother, the 'Ascetic' (*al-Zāhid*), by another, the 'Outcast' (*al-Ṭarīd*). Like Asūf, the Ascetic also begins to repeat a prophecy as he is tortured, which continues even after his death: 'The son of Adam is born naked and dies naked [...] We are all idols of clay (*ṭīn*). We are all figures of clay (*ṣalṣāl*)'.[906] Referring to the elements of Qur'ānic creation, the Ascetic, like Asūf,

[903] Ibid., 83; 103.
[904] Ibid., 129, 83; 117, 103.
[905] 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl, '*al-Saw'a*,' in *al-Saw'a*, 157-188 (Sharjah: Dā'irat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-I'lām, 2005).
[906] Ibid., 188.

reasserts the humbleness of human origins, while the story's final lines represent a mix of human and nonhuman prophecy as the raven's cawing and the Ascetic's words echo together, and the surrounding animals flee in fear.[907]

In many ways, al-Ghazāl's story is strikingly similar to the messages conveyed by *Nazīf al-ḥajar*. The latter, however, stands out in combining the plural prophecies of species with a plurality of mythic traditions. Beginning with Genesis and ending with a crucifix, but also beginning with Asūf contemplating petroglyphs and ending with his blood revealing their apocalyptic message, *Nazīf al-ḥajar* reveals the importance of what Rossetti terms 'bookending' in al-Kūnī's work.[908] Both sets of bookends, combining human and animal, comment on origins and endings but, through their juxtaposition, also disrupt one another. Separating them, meanwhile, is an array of alternative creation and fall narratives, all claiming a beginning and suggesting an ending, and told from radically defamiliarizing perspectives. Sometimes, these narratives are conveyed through fable, examined in Chapter Three through the words of the gazelle, and sometimes by silence, exemplified by Cain, momentarily captivated by the gaze of a *waddān*: 'In the dim light of the lamp, Cain saw the eyes. Were they whispering the secret of creation? Speaking of the fashioning of the desert, of the universe? Saying something of Doomsday?'.[909]

Evocations of animals' silence are, perhaps, what place them most firmly at the heart of creation and revelation in al-Kūnī's oeuvre, conveying lost truth more eloquently than words, and connected to the veiled language of Sufi and Tuareg traditions. In al-Kūnī's epic, *al-Majūs* (1990-1991; *The Animists*), for example, the novel's protagonist, Awdād, gains access to truth through his transformation into a mute *waddān*, with the

[907] Ibid.

[908] Rossetti, 'Darkness,' 52.

[909] Al-Kūnī, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, 128.

silence of his animal form causing him both suffering and insight.[910] Above all, however, the ancient, animal and silent come together in ekphrastic depictions of prehistoric cave art, tying the present to the deep past, and questioning the very ability of words to convey Truth through a philosophy of silence.

Animals of Flesh and Stone

Saharan rock paintings appear in almost all of al-Kūnī's work, revealing glimpses of a time of former fertility when human, animal and jinn mingled harmoniously. In *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, Asūf is charged with protecting these paintings by a representative from the Libyan Archaeological Department, who tells him they are the 'country's pride', and must be kept safe from thieves.[911] Asūf, however, refuses the remuneration he is offered, and, structurally, the novel represents a process of reclaiming the paintings from human concepts of 'pride' and 'possession', and revealing their esoteric message through Asūf's act of self-sacrifice.

In al-Kūnī's short story, '*al-Nuṣūṣ al-ṣakhriyya*' (1991; 'The Rock Texts'), rock art is even more explicitly depicted as a record of the desert's lost *nāmūs*, misplaced by the 'first ancestor' (*al-jadd al-awwal*) on his eternal 'journey of wandering' (*riḥlat al-tīh*).[912] Through its loss, the desert peoples ultimately descended into 'bloodshed' (*safk al-dimā'*).[913] However, some nomads attempted to piece fragments of it together in the 'language of images' (*lughat al-ṣuwar*), as a channel of communication between sky and desert, compromising between 'the sanctity of divine texts' (*qadāsat al-nuṣūṣ al-ilhiyya*) and 'the understood desert language' (*al-lugha al-ṣaḥrāwiyya al-mafhūma*).[914] The desert,

[910] Ibid., 334.
[911] Ibid., 8.
[912] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, '*al-Nuṣūṣ al-ṣakhriyya*,' in *Dīwān al-nathr al-barrī*, 75-82 (Limassol: Dār al-Tanwīr li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1991).
[913] Ibid.
[914] Ibid., 81.

in this way, became the 'homeland of the secret' (*waṭan al-sirr*), and al-Kūnī's work may be seen as a further transposition of this 'language of images' into fiction, infusing his writing with the silent, pictorial and elusive.[915] Often, paintings come to life in his novels, with animals slipping from cave walls into narrative, combining flesh and stone, blood and ink.

Painting and animal are also joined, in *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, by the term '*āthār*', referring to both the 'tracks' of living animals and the 'relics' of desert frescoes, depicting their image.[916] Ironically, it is Cain who employs this pun, expressing his desire to pursue the flesh of living animals rather than the likenesses of their ancestors.[917] Nevertheless, the analogy aptly indicates how both painting and animal represent trails of remembrance in al-Kūnī's work, leading deeper and deeper into the past, and suggesting that humanity can discover the truth of its current condition only by embracing what is other to it, but also what, at the beginning of time, was one with it. It is, perhaps, in this vision of lost, primordial wholeness that his work draws closest to that of other Libyan authors, from the obvious similarities between him and 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl to the subtler parallels with al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm.

The Sadness of the Sea

In their focus on origins, fall and civilisation, distinctions rather than similarities are most evident in the work of al-Nayhūm and al-Kūnī. While the first interprets the animal 'other' as what must be overcome, the latter envisions it as what must be reclaimed. While the first interprets cave art as an idyllic vision of human community, united by struggle against animals, the second depicts it as a harmonious intermingling of species, sundered by the rise of civilisation. While for al-Nayhūm ideal

[915] Ibid., 80.
[916] Ibid., 80. Wehr, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 4.
[917] Al-Kūnī, *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, 21.

'human society' represents a goal that should be actively pursued, for al-Kūnī, lost *Wāw* is, fundamentally, an inner state, gained through solitude. Despite being united by Sufi-inspired visions in several of their works, the first's writing is increasingly marked by humanist and progressivist visions, contrasting the mythical animism of the second. This distinction is aptly revealed in al-Kūnī's professed astonishment on hearing from al-Nayhūm that 'power' (*al-sulṭa*) had always been his goal, and that the army had simply taken a short-cut to it.[918] For al-Nayhūm, writing should intervene directly in the world, while, for al-Kūnī, it should be a means of moving into alternative spheres, where true revelation lies. This, fundamentally, represents the divide in their literary conception of animals.

Despite these differences, both authors are also driven by a similar impulse to track humanity's fundamental truths, as well as a cynical view of how these truths are made manifest in modern civilisations. In the fiction of both, deep historical visions, whether concerning baboons, Cains or cave paintings, become allegorical mirrors for current politics, as well as indications of their root causes. The fiction of both also moves increasingly into abstraction, with human characters disappearing, and replaced by symbolic visions of tyranny, stretching into the primordial past. This impulse, mirrored in broader Libyan fiction, finds its limit point in the heterotopic mirror of the ocean, in which, according to both science and scripture, all life began, and which, in Libyan fiction, is often infused with melancholy, concerning how life has evolved, and longing for what it could have become.

In Muḥammad al-Misallātī's (b. 1949) short story '*Ḥuzn al-baḥr*' (2006; 'The Sadness of the Sea'), for example, the ocean's sadness is linked to the encroachments of

[918] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-thānī*, 46.

industrialisation, and overpopulation of humanity.[919] In Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's '*al-Baḥr lā mā' fīhi*' (1965; 'The Sea Spilled Out'), meanwhile, the narrator imagines that the world stops spinning, spilling out the ocean, along with a 'cosmic ship' (*al-safīna al-kawniyya*), bearing a 'new Adam and Eve' and the promise of a world, undivided by 'barriers of language, religion, ethnicity and colour'.[920] Al-Nayhūm, furthermore, refers to the title of his *al-'Awda al-muḥzina ilā al-baḥr* (1966; *Sad Return to the Sea*) as indicating, 'the return of life to its origin, burdened with disappointment in material progress'.[921] Returning to the primordial source of life, he expresses how humans, rather than seeking individual gain, must recognise themselves as part of an 'original whole' (*al-kull al-aṣlī*), characterised by organic and spiritual interconnection.[922]

Finally, al-Kūnī presents this imagery in most striking form in his short story '*al-Baḥr*' (2004; 'The Sea'), depicting the ocean dwelling in loneliness for ages, 'calculable only through the logic of infinity', and immersed in a spiritual state: 'it would sing and sway in a passionate trance, until, exhausted, it grew still, and lay flat'.[923] Longing for a companion, the ocean finally brings land into being. Soon, however, land blooms with so much plant and animal life that the ocean is forced to create a '*dūda*' (maggot/worm) to curb its abundance. This rapacious *dūda* then proceeds to erode the land and its creatures, while the sea watches in consternation. Swelling into a great flood, it attempts to destroy the wily creature, which 'tricks' it by fashioning an ark, in which it clings onto life.[924] Combining science and mysticism, and rewriting the Noah's

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[919] Muḥammad al-Misallātī, '*Ḥuzn al-baḥr*,' in *Tafāṣīl al-yawm al-'ādī*, 127-129 (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm, 2006).
[920] Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh, '*al-Baḥr lā mā' fīhi*,' in *Thalāth majmū'āt qiṣaṣiyya* (Tripoli: Qiṭā' al-Kitāb wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 1981), 146.
[921] Al-Nayhūm, '*al-'Awda*', 82.
[922] Ibid., 131-32.
[923] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, '*al-Baḥr*,' in *al-Ṣuḥuf al-ūlā: asāṭīr wa-mutūn* (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2004), 11.
[924] Ibid., 15.

Ark story, '*al-Baḥr*' locates spiritual longing at the heart of existence, embodied in the sea, and insatiable desire at the heart of civilisation, embodied in the *dūda*, whose rapaciousness is described in the very same language as Cain's prophecy ('*lam tashba*'').[925] Reducing humanity to an unstoppable force of consumption, the story aptly sums up the sceptical, and downright condemning, gazes that have been examined in this chapter, levelled at the human by imagined animal perspectives.

Conclusion

From porcupines to flies, ravens and *waddān*, witnesses and victims of the civilising process are given a voice in the fiction discussed, whether expressing horror at humanity's brutality, or indifference to all but its flesh. Images of animals scattering, cowering in caves or feasting on human bodies portray both the fracture that civilisation has caused and the fracture at its heart. Fluctuating between close-up visions of flesh, blood, and even human cells, and panoramic visions of ages, stretching back to the primordial ocean, these images further weave together historical, mythic and creaturely perspectives. Through all, familiar paradigms of nation and family are shattered, and straightforward notions of 'humanity' are problematised as alternative divisions are drawn between predator and prey, male and female, and settled and nomadic. The deep past thus becomes an 'other world' in which a more harmonious time is envisioned, and the reasons for its disruption sought.

[925] Ibid., 14.

Conclusion – Creaturely Wonders and Warnings

'My people, here is the she-camel of God (nāqat Allāh), a sign (āya) for you. Set it free to graze in God's earth (ta'kul fī arḍ Allāh), and touch it not with harm lest an imminent punishment should overtake you'.[926]

Having begun Part One with a discussion of animals as 'signs' (*āyāt*), I return to the same concept in Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's *al-Tibr* (1989; *Gold Dust*, trans. Elliot Colla, 2008), exploring how the animal as 'sign' conveys wonder and revelation, as well as warning concerning human violence and oppression.[927] Through its pivotal human-camel relationship, the novel encompasses the themes of growing-up, survival and origins around which I have structured my thesis, leading into 'other worlds' in which human society is critiqued, while visions of shared suffering and alternative forms of communion lead to spiritual insight. It is, indeed, through these 'other worlds', and their expression through animals, that Libyan fiction is most strikingly distinguished from wider Arabic fiction.

Above all, these 'worlds' evoke what humans have forgotten – lost states that they long to regain but cannot, and that have radical consequences for thinking about both nation-state and the nature-culture divide. Moving away from concrete visions of human community, Libyan fiction is characterised by elusiveness, rebelling against monolithic discourses, and pointing both wistfully and ominously to dissatisfactory reality, and what lies tantalisingly beyond it. This vision is central to the tripartite epistemological approach that I have explored, through which rite-of-passage manqué, embrace of subsistence, and the hunt for a former harmony point to what cannot be

[926] Qur'ān 11:64, trans. Tarif Khalidi.

[927] Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr* (Misrata: al-Dār al-Jamāhiriyya li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī' wa-l-I'lān, 2005); trans. Elliott Colla, *Gold Dust* (London: Arabia Books, 2008).

said outright, to what remains beyond human grasp and to what is characterised by creaturely vulnerability and fracture. With animals at their heart, such visions also have far-reaching implications for thinking about animal studies. Serving as wonders and warnings, animals call humans to assess their current reality through striving to recall their former, nonhuman nature, while also hinting at the consequences that arise from not doing so. Acting as '*āyāt*' (signs), they represent part of what might be termed an eco-poetics, rooted in Sufi notions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the oneness-of-being). Humans, meanwhile, represent violently disruptive presences, obscuring these 'signs', conveyed in microcosmic form in *al-Tibr* through the companionship of man and camel.

Published in the same year as *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, the novel is set in the early 20th century, and, unlike the wild pursuits of the former, is structured around companionship. Like so much Libyan fiction it brings together the historical, mythic and spiritual, as the camel moves from a purebred possession, and marker of social status, to a hybrid sign, combining passion, suffering and divine revelation. Given the camel, of *mahrī* stock, as a gift for his coming-of-age, the novel's protagonist, Ukhayyad, immediately develops an excessive love for him, preventing his smooth transition into adulthood. After marrying, as starvation and war wrack the desert, Ukhayyad is torn between his *mahrī* friend and young family. Even as he attempts to pawn the animal to a relative, the camel returns to haunt him, leading him into the remote desert. At the same time, however, society also continues to haunt Ukhayyad. Hearing a rumour that he sold his wife and son for a handful of gold dust, he confronts and kills the relative who first took his camel. Tracked down by avengers, both he and his camel are then brutally slaughtered.

Compelling Ukhayyad to rebellion, near-death experience and spiritual insight, the camel encompasses elements of all the animals that this thesis has tracked: the

viscerality of the Eid sheep; the elusiveness of the bird; the wisdom of the talking lizard, rat and gazelle; the transcendence of the suffering jerboa, turtle and *waddān*; the monkey 'others' and 'selves'; and the judging witness of fly, porcupine and 'prehuman'. As a microcosm for all of existence, the *maḥrī* even embodies the sadness of the sea, driven into a state of melancholy by human brutality. At the same time, through his stubborn and passionate personality, he also moves beyond the animals discussed, actively calling for Ukhayyad's response, and haunting him until it is provoked. Ukhayyad's excessive love for him, meanwhile, represents not, as has been suggested, 'the sin of "shirk", or idolatry', but a radical embrace of 'other worlds', values and epistemologies.[928]

Undoubtedly, the animal's rich personality is a reflection of the broader place of camels in the Arabic literary tradition, as well as its centrality to Libyan society. Of all creatures, the camel most poignantly embodies the complexities of the nation's transformation from nomadism to urbanisation, and colony to *Jamāhiriyya*, with its widespread disappearance marking a sense of loss. It also, however, is central to wider explorations of humans' desire for wilderness, freedom and the divine. Like the animals discussed, it is therefore both a symbolic figure, pointing literally and figuratively to contemporary social issues, and a 'sign', pointing irrevocably beyond them.

Camels in Arabic Literature: Communality, Animality and Spirituality

Historically, the camel has functioned as a companion species, service animal and sacrificial victim. In what Robert Irwin wittily, and aptly, describes as 'the camel-infested imagination of pre-Islamic Arabia', this multi-faceted presence is prominently

[928] Elmarsafy, 'Ibrahim al-Koni's Hybrid Aesthetic,' 194.

apparent.[929] As discussed in my introduction, the camel carries the poet on his liminal journey through the wilderness, and is often sacrificed at the end as an affirmation of community.[930] At the same time, the wrongful slaughter of a camel indicates problems within community, as Michael Sells observes in the *mu'allaqa* of Ṭarafa: 'sacrifice-gone-wrong leads to [...] the splitting of both psyche and community into mutually hostile voices [...] Ṭarafa's ode ends not with the integration of the poet into the community, but with a vague, repeated threat [...]'.[931] As seen in Chapter Four, through discussion of 'Abdallāh al-Ghazāl's *al-Tābūt*, the Qur'ān similarly links the camel to social disintegration. In both 7:73-4 and 11:64, the wrongful slaughter of '*nāqat Allāh*' (the she-camel of God) leads to the destruction of the people of Thamūd by an earthquake. Accorded a special place within divine consideration, the camel thus serves as wonder and warning, as well as mediator between individual, community and divine.

The perfect complexity of the species is also evoked in Qur'ān 88:17, 'Will they not consider how camels were created?', while its adaptation to human needs is described in 36:71-3, through reference to God having subdued the '*an'ām*' (grazing live-stock) for human use.[932] Alongside its connections to divine agency, these verses reveal the camel's role as an essential part of desert survival, allowing humans to continue their nomadic lifestyles, and evolved to cope with long travels. As Donna Haraway describes dogs in Western cultures, the camel represents 'a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings'.[933] In this way, the species combines the practicability of human use with the mythic and divine.

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[929] Robert Irwin, *Camel* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 68.

[930] Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*, 29.

[931] Michael Sells, 'The Mu'allaqa of Ṭarafa,' *Journal of Arabic Literature* 17 (1986): 23.

[932] Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'ān*, 91.

[933] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 11-12.

The camel's former centrality, however, now stands in sharp contrast to its increasing consignment to the past, making it, in Libyan literature at least, a particularly potent figure for negotiating tradition and modernity. In Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's *Nafaq tuḍīʿuhu imraʾa wāḥida* (1991; *A Tunnel Lit by One Woman*), the narrator laments the 'mass slaughter' of camels in Tripoli, and their replacement with cars.[934] In typically practical fashion, al-Ṣādiq al-Nayhūm argues for the preservation and rearing of camels as a species indigenous to desert environments, and laments their replacement with cattle.[935] In Libyan oral poetry, meanwhile, Yūsuf Fanūsh explores, alongside traditional expressions of the camel's exemplary qualities, lamentations over its transformation into a passive commodity rather than an active companion.[936] The most famous line embodying this lamentation, Fanūsh observes, is '*shāyilīnik wa-intī illī shayyāla*' (you the carrier become the carried), expressing the camel's relegation to a product, freighted for the meat industry, when formerly it was the most exulted form of desert transport.[937]

In broader Libyan fiction, the she-camel in al-Ghazāl's *al-Tābūt* has already been discussed in terms of the disastrous cosmic consequences of her slaughter. In an opening scene from al-Faqīh's *Fiʾrān bilā juḥūr*, meanwhile, Sheikh Ḥāmid Abū Layla decides to sacrifices his camel for the starving tribe. Described as his friend and only means of livelihood, the Sheikh's guilt and anguish over sacrificing this camel are extreme, and assuaged only by witnessing his people's relief: 'When Sheikh Hamed saw them laughing, he joined in, and suddenly his sorrow over the camel became lighter

[934] Al-Faqīh, *Gardens of the Night*, 473.
[935] Al-Nayhūm, *al-Islām fī-l-asr*, 64.
[936] Yūnis 'Umar Fanūsh, *al-Ibl fī-l-shiʿr al-shaʿbī: dirāsa fī ṣūrat al-ibl kamā yaʿkisuhā al-shiʿr al-shaʿbī fī Lībiyā* (Sirte: Majlis al-Thaqāfa al-'Āmm), 50.
[937] Ibid., 203.

and easier to bear. He was glad to see them happy'.[938] In both novels, the authors play with the literary conventions associated with camels as mediators between individual, community and divine, with their wrongful sacrifice leading to catastrophe, and rightful slaughter to affirmation of human bonds.

In both novels, the camel's physicality and animality are also emphasised through what Irwin describes as the 'fabulously rich vocabulary of camel-related words' in Arabic.[939] In al-Faqīh's *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, for example, the camel refuses to 'sit down' (*yabruk*), 'froths' at the mouth (*yantashir ḥawlahu al-zabad*), 'bellows furiously' (*yurghī raghā'an qawiyyan*), and shows signs of 'commotion' or 'lust' (*al-hiyāj*).[940] Starkly contrasting the novel's talking jerboas, the camel's animal presence and wordless suffering add to the many narrative 'awkwardnesses' that, as discussed in Chapter Three, emerge between fable and silence.[941] The camel, in both novels, indeed emerges as a particularly 'animalized' literary figure, connected in intriguing manners to its strong bonds with humans and the transcendent revelation it often conveys.

In *al-Tibr*, Ukhayyad, unlike Sheikh Abū Layla, refuses to sacrifice his companion when hardship strikes, while the camel's various forms of mistreatment, at the hands of him and of others, have disastrous consequences on the desert's human communities, uncovering fault lines within them. The novel is, as McHugh notes, set 'at the twilight of the era in which camels reigned as primary providers of desert transport', marking the increase of technologies in the desert, the species' consignment to the meat industry, and the attempts of modern nation-states to settle their nomadic peoples.[942] These issues, both environmental and political, are certainly latent within the novel.

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[938] Al-Faqīh, *Homeless Rats*, 26.

[939] Irwin, *Camel*, 78.

[940] Al-Faqīh, *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr*, 10.

[941] Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 125.

[942] Susan McHugh, 'Hybrid Species,' 289.

Above all, it is constructed around the concept of '*arḍ Allāh*' (the land of God), a plane of spiritual and environmental connectivity that, throughout my analyses, has stood in contrast to human discourses and divisions. In *al-Tibr*, the camel emerges as the only possible vehicle for traversing *arḍ Allāh*, literally bearing Ukhayyad across the desert, while also leading him into defamiliarizing visions of his present and past. The camel's 'animal' nature further emerges as his chief connection to divine revelation, and emergence as 'creaturely sign'.

Maḥrī and Man: Companionship as Journey into Other Worlds

As Sa'īd al-Ghānamī comments, the human-camel relationship is central to the aesthetic and thematic construction of *al-Tibr*.[943] In it, the man and his *mahrī* become one protagonist, making sense only in terms of the other, and with the death of one necessitating both that of the other, and the end of the novel.[944] This identification clearly reflects the pre-Islamic traditions discussed, as well as Tuareg poetry and song, in which man and camel are often equated.[945] While inseparable, however, the relationship of Ukhayyad and the *mahrī* is characterised by changing power dynamics, and far from consistently harmonious. Ukhayyad scolds the camel, while the camel shifts between different forms of 'sign', mirroring Ukhayyad, challenging him, comforting him and delivering him spiritual insight. Through their companionship, the themes of growing-up, survival and origins are encapsulated, with their bond dramatising the hunt for 'other worlds' and the dangers that circumscribe it.

[943] Al-Ghānamī, *Malḥamat al-ḥudūd*, 73.
[944] Ibid.
[945] Casajus, *La tente*, 88, 102-103.

Growing-up: Rite-of-passage Manqué

Given to Ukhayyad by the chief of the venerable Ahaggar tribes, the camel is initially introduced as a source of pride. Obsessed with his identity as a '*mahrī*', indicating his pure origins, and an '*ablaq*' (piebald), indicating the rarity of his colouring, the first pages depict Ukhayyad bragging to other young men:

> Have any of you ever seen a piebald Mahri before? [...] Have you ever seen a thoroughbred so graceful, so light of foot and so well proportioned? [...] Have you ever seen a Mahri who could compete with him in pride, fierceness, and loyalty?[946]

Expecting no answer to his questions, Ukhayyad is utterly absorbed in his camel's physical traits and dignified personality, both attributed to his thoroughbred nature. All through the novel, however, the camel challenges both expectations, traversing gruesome physical changes, and consistently failing to act with the patience, fierceness and pride that Ukhayyad urges upon him. At the same time, he transforms Ukhayyad's own values, leading him, from the very first, to upset social expectations. As Casajus remarks, the camel is an important mark of nobility among Tuareg communities, central to interactions among the upper echelons of society.[947] In *al-Tibr*, however, the *mahrī* becomes profoundly disruptive of them, overturning, like the Eid sheep discussed in Chapter One, the conventional meanings and behaviours attached to it. Above all, his relationship with Ukhayyad dramatises the struggle between nature and culture, with the camel recalling the man to principles of passion, freedom and Truth, from which social expectations have distanced him.

[946] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 5.

[947] Casajus, *La Tente*, 105.

As a boy, Ukhayyad's relationship with the camel certainly mirrors many of the companionships discussed in Part One, as he steals food for him and refers to him as a '*ṣadīq*' (friend).[948] In the first case, he is scolded by his father, and in the second he is mocked by his peers, as the camel, docile and affectionate, is described 'following on his heels like a dog'.[949] As his father declares, it is shameful to feed 'livestock' (*al-dābba*) at a time when people do not have enough.[950] Ukhayyad's response is the challenging statement: 'The piebald (*al-ablaq*) is not livestock (*dābba*). The piebald is the piebald (*al-ablaq huwa al-ablaq*)'.[951] While the wittiness of his response delights his father, challenging notions of fixed identity through creaturely fellowship, Ukhayyad's attitude becomes less acceptable as he grows to maturity, and the camel continues to implicate him in 'scandals' (*faḍā'iḥ*).[952]

The clearest example of this comes during what in Tamazight is called a '*tɐnde*', a group camel dance, often taking place at a wedding, and which Casajus describes as the most important entertainment in Tuareg society, in which young men and their camels vie for praise and esteem.[953] Following Ukhayyad's attempts to teach the camel to dance, however, the animal rebels, and rather than the '*qaṣīdat madīḥ*' (panegyric) Ukhayyad had hoped to win, they are both scorned.[954] With the tribe organised in rings around the dancers, the camel erupts out of the circle in a 'frenzied motion across the dance arena', dramatising the manner in which, throughout the novel, he continues to upset the careful ordering of society.[955] 'Camel-related' words are used to describe him as

[948] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 21.
[949] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 18.
[950] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 18; *al-Tibr*, 20.
[951] Ibid.
[952] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 11.
[953] Casajus, *La tente*, 98.
[954] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 8.
[955] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 10.

'frenzied' (*hā'ij*), and how he 'bellows' (*yurghī*) and has 'froth' (*zabad*) around his jaws.[956] Following the incident, Ukhayyad, as throughout the novel, scolds him for his 'animal' behaviour, urging him to act instead with restraint and nobility. Heedless to these entreaties, the camel continues to offer only stubborn affection and loyalty. Rite-of-passage therefore takes an unexpected course, with the camel leading Ukhayyad away from community, and into a perception of his own creaturely vulnerability, as well as forms of elusive truth, echoing both the Eid sheep and birds of Part One.

This becomes even clearer in the novel's main rite-of-passage, in which Ukhayyad and the *mahrī* embark upon a mad and transformative journey through the desert. After the animal contracts mange, following an amorous adventure with a she-camel, Ukhayyad takes him to the Maymūn fields in search of silphium, which, he is told, is the only possible cure. After consuming the plant, however, the camel is driven mad with pain and careers off across the desert, with Ukhayyad barely managing to hold onto him. Their subsequent journey vividly reflects the *raḥīl* (desert journey) of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*. More broadly, it evokes Joseph Campbell's paradigm of heroic quest, in which the individual overcomes trials in the wilderness to return home transformed.[957] Typical of al-Kūnī's paradigm-shifting pursuits, however, the journey of man and camel leads not to affirmation of social values, but further into wilderness and alternative forms of spirituality.

During the journey, Ukhayyad, like Asūf in *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, begins to resemble the animal he is pursuing, with 'froth' (*zabad*) appearing on his lips.[958] Unlike Asūf, however, he is not driven by a mysterious, transcendent pull, but a bond of fellowship, as he finally manages to clutch onto the camel. At the journey's end, meanwhile, both he and the

[956] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 11.
[957] Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Muḥarramāt qabaliyya*, 150.
[958] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 38.

animal appear to be born anew, and united in a vision of creaturely and spiritual transformation, with the flesh of human and animal joining. Ukhayyad awakens to find that he is naked and his camel is no more than a 'solid red mass', stripped of his prestigious 'piebald' skin.[959] As he climbs onto his mount, their wounded skin joins: 'Ukhayyad's body, now also naked, fused with the viscous flesh of the Mahri. Flesh met flesh, blood mixed with blood. In the past they had been merely friends. Today, they had been joined by a much stronger tie'.[960] This moment of physical and spiritual union moves the relationship of *mahrī* and man beyond that of owner and animal, and, as in so much Libyan fiction, is achieved only through grim suffering and acute perception of creaturely vulnerability.

Echoing the visceral images of the Eid sheep discussed in Chapter One, the *mahrī* is described as '*maslūkh'* (skinned) and as a '*dhabīḥa*' (slaughter victim).[961] With the stripping of his piebald skin, and the social prestige it conveys, Ukhayyad is finally able to relate to him as a fellow creature, like the children of Part One. Earlier in the pursuit, he further prays that he might assume some of the camel's suffering, declaring: 'He's carried me on his back for years, so why can't I carry his burden for just a few hours?'[962] Echoing the simple acts of hospitality of the children in Part One, and the 'subsistence survivors' in Part Two, his entreaty is based in a perception of equal belonging in a world of struggle. Behind this simple declaration of hospitality, however, lie the violence, pressures and divisions of wider society, and the alienation of the human and suffering of the camel within it.

[959] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 44.
[960] Ibid., 47.
[961] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 42.
[962] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 36.

Survival: The Collapse of Community and Call of the Creaturely

According to traditional paradigms of passage, the desert universe of *al-Tibr* should be restored to harmony after Ukhayyad's adventure. Instead, disaster ensues on an individual and community level. The desert descends into famine and war, and the tribes scatter in search of food, fleeing attacking Italians. Ukhayyad, meanwhile, marries contrary to the wishes of his father, refusing to assume leadership of the tribe, and is cut off. As the Italians attack, he prepares to fight with the *mahrī*, only to learn that the resistance has already been quelled, and his father has died a heroic death in battle, further indicating his and the camel's continued inability to live up to the noble and chivalrous expectations into which they were born. Thereafter, subsistence survival is at the novel's heart.

Like the fiction examined in Part Two, the battle for survival results from the harshness of nature, infused with intimations of divine wrath, as well as simple human brutality, indicated as Ukhayyad wonders how 'Even God's vast wilderness (*ṣaḥrā' Allāh al-wāsi'a*) could be transformed into a prison'.[963] Like the novels of Part Two, the silent and not so silent suffering of the *mahrī* becomes a focal point for the dilemmas of survival, as Ukhayyad must choose between social responsibilities and creaturely fellowship, facing increasing pressure to slaughter the *maḥrī* in order to provide for his family. In a dream, he is visited by a soothsayer who orders him to slaughter the animal as a sacrifice to the goddess Tānīt in order to restore prosperity. Shortly after, his wife pressures him to kill the animal for food. To both, Ukhayyad responds with the disgust of one faced with an act of cannibalism. He describes the soothsayer as a cannibalistic '*ghūla*' (ghoul), and calls his wife an '*imra'a waḥshiyya*' (wild woman).[964] Like Asūf in *Nazīf al-ḥajar* and Mas'ūd in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, Ukhayyad's unconventional

[963] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 151; *al-Tibr*, 139.
[964] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 77, 81.

attitude to the animal reflects his outcast status, and what might be described as 'childish' outlook. As Susan Rasmussen observes, in Tuareg societies the 'cultural transformation of animals into meat' often symbolises the 'transformation of humans into full adult social persons'.[965] In refusing this transformation, Ukhayyad's radically 'other' perspective is revealed.

Eventually, Ukhayyad nevertheless decides to pawn the camel to his wife's relative, Dūdū, visiting from the south. At this point, Qur'ān 11:64 is cited: 'My people, here is the she-camel of God, a sign (*āya*) for you. Set it free to graze in God's earth (*ta'kul fī arḍ Allāh*), and touch it not with harm lest an imminent punishment should overtake you'.[966] Appearing at this juncture, the citation provides a pivot for examining the camel as 'sign'. Like much Libyan fiction, *al-Tibr* is elusive and riddle-like, with the words '*ishārāt*' (signs) and '*asrār*' (secret) echoing through it. Packed with competing epistemological systems, voiced by Sufi Sheikhs, pagan soothsayers and 'old women', the novel aptly conveys the plurality of al-Kūnī's fiction, often appearing like a detective novel, in which multiple cosmic interpretations are suggested for every event. Ukhayyad, caught among the desert's 'signs', is aware of their paramount importance, and of remaining receptive to them: 'Like prophecies, signs flicker into view only for one moment before they disappear and are gone forever'.[967] The *mahrī*, meanwhile, becomes a focal point for them, interpreted in different ways by almost every character, as well as used and abused by them. At the same time, his creaturely suffering and fellowship ultimately point beyond them.

Indicating all the mistreatment that the *mahrī* suffers, from being whipped to castrated and pawned, the 'harm' evoked in 11:64 is ultimately rooted in Ukhayyad's failure to

[965] Rasmussen, 'Animal Sacrifice and the Problem of Translation,' 159.
[966] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 83.
[967] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 65.

respond to his creaturely fidelity, forcing him instead into human parameters. Even after he is pawned, the camel's loyalty never wavers. As Ukhayyad settles into domestic stability and 'laxity' (*istirkhā'*), the camel repeatedly escapes his new owners, and tears him from it.[968] Literally haunted by his bellows, echoing across the wilderness, Ukhayyad eventually realises that their bond is stronger than starvation, wondering, 'how could he let family and famine betray this divine gift that had joined their fates?'.[969] At Dūdū's request, Ukhayyad divorces his wife in order to reclaim his camel.

Through abandoning his wife and son for a camel, Ukhayyad can certainly be interpreted as an anti-hero. His act, indeed, lies between the creaturely hospitality of the water-carrier in *al-Ṭāḥūna*, and the excessive affection of Mrs de Vries and the Dutch people for the dog Ramaḍān. Until the novel's end, he himself remains torn between social duties and unconditional affection for the camel. Constantly preoccupied by issues of prestige and nobility, he fluctuates, like Mas'ūd, between simple desire for freedom, companionship and sustenance, and the guilt, shame and hatred provoked in him by other humans. Above all, creaturely fellowship therefore emerges through a profound malaise with human society, and cynicism concerning its potential for harmony, acting as a compensatory vision of affection and loyalty. Alongside Ukhayyad's attachment to the *mahrī*, his profound social alienation is central, with Alyn Hine evoking his affinities to Dostoevky's brooding 'anti-heroes'.[970] Like Asūf, Ukhayyad fears the jealous and deceitful intentions that shine from the eyes of other young men, and ultimately imagines that no companionship is possible other than with his camel. Like Mas'ūd, part anti-hero and part voice of truth, he forms 'a

[968] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 87.

[969] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 93.

[970] Alyn Hine, 'Empty Spaces at the Heart of Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's Literary World,' *Comparative Critical Studies* 11, Issue Supplement (2014): 16-17.

creaturely fellowship by default, self-evident and undeniable, in a world of imbalance and injustice'.[971] In this way, the *mahrī* sums up two central features of my thesis: the animal as a site for exploring and critiquing social discourses, duties and structures; and a disrupter of them, offering both a simpler ethics and spiritual insight. Furthermore, *al-Tibr* indicates how, whatever the moral ambiguities of the human issues at stake, and the place of animals within them, these animals tend to be portrayed favourably, through their simple desire to roam freely.

The novel's conclusion, meanwhile, is driven by the competing demands of the *maḥrī* and the 'gold dust' (*tibr*) after which it is named. In all al-Kūnī's work, gold dust consistently causes conflict, signifying all the wealth that exceeds *rizq* (sustenance). As examined in Part Two, animals often provide an unsettling commentary on this wealth, from the tribes' barley in *Fi'rān bilā juḥūr* to Mas'ūd's three francs and the *fgi's* 'invisible commodities' in *Min Makka ilā hunā*, and the meat sought by Cain in *Nazīf al-ḥajar* and Jum'a in *al-Tābūt*. Above all, animals hint at what is forgotten in pursuit of it, as well as the conflict it causes. In *al-Tibr*, Ukhayyad and the camel's death ultimately results from the greed of Dūdū's avengers, seeking to lay claim to his gold. Echoing Qur'ān 11:64, the animal's slaughter again signifies all that is amiss in the desert, echoing, like the other silent animals examined, the words of Donna Haraway: '[...] through our ideologically loaded narratives of their lives, animals 'hail' us to account for the regimes in which they and we must live'.[972] Like much fiction, a sense of cosmic foreboding also surrounds this in *al-Tibr*, in the form of warning desert signs and wistful longing for what once was.

[971] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 184.

[972] Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 17.

Origins: Human Forgetfulness and Animal Reminders

At the heart of *al-Tibr*, as of all al-Kūnī's work, is the idea that human alienation and violence ensue from a moment of fall in the deep past. As in broader Libyan fiction, the time before this fall represents a longed-for ideal, embodied, in microcosmic form, in the relationship of man and camel: 'With the piebald, he had wandered God's wide desert (*ṣaḥrā' Allāh al-wāsi'a*). But then woman appeared and separated him from tribe and companion. Didn't Sheikh Musa say that it was woman who drove Adam from the garden of paradise?'.[973] As examined in Part Three, civilisation's current state of antagonism is attributed to numerous different factors in Libyan 'deep historical' imaginings, from failure to employ reason to lying, betrayal and greed. In *al-Tibr*, 'woman' signifies the social pressures placed on Ukhayyad, while, in other of al-Kūnī's novels, fall is primarily linked to gold. Both ultimately lead to '*istirkhā"* (laxity), stemming from negligence of 'signs', which, as explored, represent both the alterity of desert creatures, striving for life, and their fundamental unity with the self, opening onto visions of spiritual and material interconnectivity.

Alongside origins and fall, the camel, indeed, leads Ukhayyad to a mystical perception of original unity, accompanying, as in al-Ghazāl's *al-Tābūt*, the more grimly material nature of their initial union of flesh:

> As if in a dream, he saw their friendship as it had been at the very beginning, before they were born, before they were clots in their mothers' wombs [...] He saw them before they were a desire that took hold of bodies, before they were even dust drifting in the endless void [...] And now he saw it clearly: before they ever existed as anything, they had been as one being.[974]

[973] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 98; *al-Tibr*, 91.
[974] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 113.

Like Najwā Bin Shatwān's *Wabr al-aḥṣina*, man and camel's unborn state is connected to a primordial vision of the 'endless void' of deep history, both mystical and organic. Like all the fiction examined in Chapter Six, human origins and histories are also defamiliarized though being seen in terms of an animal, whether as victim, witness, or, in this case, companion in the journey of evolution. In the process, simple allegiance to tribe, nation and humanity is radically shaken.

Meanwhile, as Ukhayyad hides from the avengers seeking his death, he discovers a cave painting of a *waddān* being hunted by a group of men, and reads his own fate within it, echoing the primordial vision of predator and prey relayed by the grandmother in Aḥmad al-Faytūrī's *Sarīb*. Through the *waddān's* flight, and the inevitability of his death, Ukhayyad finally understands the creaturely prophecy conveyed by the camel: 'Yes – the mouflon, like the piebald, was a messenger sent from on high. Divine messengers such as these are so very rare!'.[975] After the *waddān* is shot, Ukhayyad further reflects: 'My God – why did the innocent always fall at the hands of the most malevolent creatures? Why do such people kill every messenger that is sent to them?'.[976] Mirroring both al-Faytūrī's notion of 'refuge' and Ben Hameda's 'flytopia' in *La compagnie des Tripolitaines*, homelessnessness and flight are envisioned as inevitable states. At the same time, they are also embraced as the sole means of gaining freedom. As Hine observes of al-Kūnī's work, 'home is not a fixed place but a state of mind that is found through the act of travelling, and occasionally reaching moments of inapprehensible bliss'.[977] In *al-Tibr*, the flight of man and camel through the desert therefore represents both an indictment of human violence, and a celebration of an

[975] Ibid., 157.

[976] Ibid., 158.

[977] Alyn Hine, 'Travelling Home: Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's *al-Tibr* (*Gold Dust*).' *Comparative Critical Studies* 10, Issue Supplement (2013): 17.

alternative form of being, with the camel serving as both warning and wonder, and bringing together human passion, animal vulnerability and divine revelation.

Creaturely Camel: Hybrid Revelation and the Animal's Unknowability

In most readings of *al-Tibr*, the anthropomorphism of the *mahrī* is emphasised, with Elmarsafy suggesting that he embodies animistic worldviews in which the animal is recognised as a 'disguised human'.[978] Indeed, the *mahrī* is referred to by one character as a 'human being in a camel's skin', and by another as a 'mirror' of his rider.[979] This, however, does not capture the full extent of his hybrid complexity, referred to, variously, as '*ḥayawān*' (animal/living being), '*ṣadīq*' (friend), '*rasūl*' (prophet) and '*niṣfahu al-ilāhī*' (Ukhayyad's divine half).[980] With each appellation, the animal's divine, human and animal characteristics overlap, moving beyond straightforward anthropomorphism or allegory. It is in this hybridity that his power lies, with his animal gaze and incomprehensible grunting conveying revelation, and his simple desires formulating a creaturely ethics, reflecting that of the speaking and silent creatures of Part Two.

In his study of camels, Irwin ponders:

> What is it like to live in a space that is to a large extent shaped and defined by its smell [...] How would it be to spend one half of one's year utterly untroubled by thoughts of sex, but then to spend part of the winter violently obsessed with it [...] What is it in the camel that makes it so readily submissive to human commands?[981]

[978] Elmarsafy, 'Ibrahim al-Koni's Hybrid Aesthetic,' 195.
[979] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 15, 97.
[980] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 11, 25, 144, 105.
[981] Irwin, *Camel*, 9-10.

In considering various aspects of the camel's physical constitution, the reader realises to what extent al-Kūnī bases the *mahrī* on animal traits. Firstly, he is characterised by affection, loyalty and docility, as well as a stubborn and angry streak. These are all traits traditionally associated with camels, and, in al-Kūnī's work, rarely with humans. Underlying all of them, meanwhile, is the *mahrī's* inability to forget. At one point, Ukhayyad attempts to wipe his memory, but fails miserably. Forgetting, after all, is an eminently human sin. Moreover, the *mahrī's* powerful memory specifically arises from his keen sense of smell, one of the characteristics flagged up by Irwin. Sniffing Ukhayyad on the breeze after their separation the camel is thus compelled to seek him out.[982]

Secondly, the *mahrī's* experiences are all depicted in decidedly animalistic, and often grotesque, terms. He is, for example, made to mate with a female with a large audience watching, as well as castrated and forced to swallow his own testicles. The most striking parallels between him and Ukhayyad also result not from his anthropomorphism, but the emphasising of Ukhayyad's physicality. The camel, for example, is, at one point, said to vomit 'frothy mucus' as a result of his 'rage' (*al-ghaḍab*), while Ukhayyad vomits 'yellow bile' when experiencing 'hatred' (*al-ghill*).[983] These animal traits are significantly also tied to the man and camel's spiritual rite-of-passage, with their desert journey prompted not by a transcendent call to adventure and liminality, but the camel's sexual desire, leading first to illness, then to madness, injury and enlightenment.

Finally, the *mahrī* never speaks, nor are his thoughts conveyed. Instead, his moans and grunts are transcribed into the narrative to convey their literal sound: '*Aw-a-a-a-a-a-a*'. As al-Ghānamī comments, this meaningless word gains significance only through

[982] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 108.

[983] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 100, 89; *al-Tibr*, 92, 81.

Ukhayyad's interpretations of it.[984] At the same time, it also transcends these interpretations, cutting through the 'desert silence', and emerging as a form of prophecy.[985] In this respect, it reflects much of the elusiveness of animal 'speech' examined, from birdsong to the squeaking of jerboas, the *waddān's* mysterious gaze and even the nature of fable, incomprehensible to human characters. Underlying all is a sense of the limitations of human knowledge, an indication of all that they fail to hear, and a questioning of the convictions that they nevertheless hold so firmly.

In *al-Tibr*, this is linked to a yet more fundamental questioning of human language itself. At one point, Ukhayyad ponders how, 'In order to converse with another living creature, a person has to speak in the Devil's tongue. And in that moment, all vision of the divine vanishes, and all signs of heaven disappear'.[986] Through his relationship with the *mahrī*, alternatives are offered to human language, or the 'Devil's tongue'. This, again, is exemplified during their desert journey, in which Ukhayyad loses the ability of human speech: 'Man and camel spoke to one another, as brothers, by way of gesture'.[987] In the original Arabic, this communication is described as an exchange of '*kalimat al-sirr*' (the word of the secret), conveyed '*bi-l-aṭrāf*' (by means of limbs), combining the spiritual and the physical with the fundamental unknowability of the '*sirr*' (secret).[988] Beyond this elusive 'secret', however, the camel, like many of the other animals examined, also communicates condemnation, with his cry and gaze alternating between joy, rage, sadness and pain, offering insight only into human destructiveness.

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[984] Al-Ghānamī, *Malḥamat al-ḥudūd*, 72-3.
[985] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 162.
[986] Ibid., 135.
[987] Ibid., 50.
[988] Al-Kūnī, *al-Tibr*, 47.

Striving towards transcendent spirituality, as well as the reality of the animal other, suffering under human brutality, *al-Tibr* both imagines up answers to Irwin's questions concerning the camel's nature, while leaving the full nature of the *mahrī's* experiences beyond the reader's grasp. An essential yet unreachable narrative presence, both intimately close and unknowable, the *mahrī* is a sign, fleetingly understood by way of companionship of the sort conveyed by Haraway:

> *We are training each other in acts of communication we barely understand. We are, constitutively, companion species. We make each other up, in the flesh. Significantly other to each other, in specific difference, we signify in the flesh a nasty developmental infection called love. This love is an historical aberration and a naturalcultural legacy*.[989]

Disrupting human discourses with his sad eyes and mournful moans, the *mahrī*, above all, moves the narrative into the realms of mystical 'love' and 'other worlds'. Like the monkeys, examined in Chapter Five, he reveals states of being that humans have left behind, and the consequences of this. Like the prey and victims of Chapter Six, he also suffers these consequences himself and embodies, through passion and transcendence, means of briefly overcoming them. As stated, he sums up and extends the traits of all the animals examined, expressive of the elusive nature of Libyan fiction and its movement into 'other worlds' through which both nation and species are assessed.

Libyan Other Worlds and the Human Imaginary

Describing the 'quintessence' of Libya and its fiction, Ethan Chorin describes a series of paintings entitled 'Yellow Beings' by Libyan artist Muḥammad Bin Lāmīn (b. 1969).[990] When asked about the identity of these beings, part-human, part-animal and part-mythic, Bin Lāmīn defined them as 'spiritual creatures [...] somehow bound up with the

[989] Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 2-3.
[990] Chorin, *Translating Libya*, 18

miracle of existence. Perhaps they are leaves which have fallen from an old tree that is no longer there, or people who have yellowed with maturity'.[991] Alongside themes of alienation and violence, Bin Lāmīn's words echo how Libyan fiction is simply also charged with wonder in existence and its beings, both at the mercy of gravity, like leaves falling from trees, and transcending it. This, certainly, is the spirit of the *mahrī* in *al-Tibr*, channelling moments of revelation, in which the difficulty of being is profoundly linked to its wondrousness.

Among the novel's many heterotopic moments, in which human discourses and divisions give way to 'other worlds' are those of shared pain and empathy, as when Ukhayyad comforts the ailing camel: 'together the two wept, each licking away the tears of the other, tasting the salt and the pain. When the shadows of death descend, this is all creatures can do'.[992] At another point, Ukhayyad explicitly recognises the camel's pain as divine: 'At this early hour, the melancholic piebald seemed saint-like in his pose. [...] How appalling living creatures seem when their hearts are so free of worry or concern! Only sadness can implant the glow of divinity in a heart'.[993] Through the utmost moments of pain, meanwhile, the *mahrī* and man also become most fully joined, with injured flesh fusing with injured flesh. In contrast, are moments of transcendent joy, as when Ukhayyad and the *mahrī* gain access to a plentiful oasis, or simply travel across 'God's wide desert', with the camel serving as a heterotopic vehicle between the mythic and real, *'ālam al-ghayb wa-l-shahāda*. Indeed, while Foucault identifies the ship as the 'heterotopia *par excellence*', and an Arabic adage has it that the camel is the 'ship' (*safīna*) of the desert, *al-Tibr* brings the two together: 'The piebald was his saviour, the vessel (*safīna*) that would deliver him to freedom. And here

[991] Ibid.

[992] Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 26.

[993] Ibid., 122.

they were, racing like gazelles across God's wide desert (*ṣaḥrā' Allāh al-wāsi'a*) – that everlasting desert stretching from here to the hereafter'.[994]

Al-Kūnī has stated that the most pertinent analysis of *al-Tibr* when it was first published pinpointed how it takes place 'in a world which lies outside of time'.[995] Hearing this critique was a moment of revelation for him, revealing to him the heterotopic nature of his work. Exemplifying what might be termed the 'anti-cartographical impulse' of Libyan fiction, *al-Tibr* is, however, also rooted in the solidly real, pursuing metaphysical truth through the local and immediate, the 'permutations of necessity and materiality' of place and time.[996] Both a beautiful novel and a gruesome one, it fluctuates between immanence and transcendence, concluding with Ukhayyad's 'grisly death', which also transforms into the 'completion of his union with God'.[997] Like so much Libyan fiction, truth and beauty emerge from difficulty, affection from solitude and hardship, and abundance from sparsity. The animal, meanwhile, is the cornerstone of this process, allowing the human to perceive the flaws of his species, while also leading to brief moments in which alternative ethics, modes of being and 'other worlds' operate.

These 'other worlds' are certainly expressive of phenomena specific to the Libyan literary imaginary, most particularly a sense of spiritual and environmental interconnectivity, compounded by explorations of the country's fragile ecology, and more far-reaching enquiries into the fundamental viability of nation and civilisation. At the same time, they also hint at something shared in the human-animal encounter, overriding cultural particularities. Whatever genre or symbolic systems frame literary animals, they become disruptive, embodying the 'other' which humans must confront,

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[994] Foucault, 'Of Other Space,' 27; Al-Kūnī, *Gold Dust*, 131; *al-Tibr*, 122.

[995] Al-Kūnī, *'Udūs al-surā: al-juz' al-awwal*, 377.

[996] Pick, *Creaturely Poetics*, 5.

[997] Hine, 'Travelling Home,' 24.

and which reveals their alienation and desire for alternative truths. Reading fiction for animals often therefore leads to the most intense points of a narrative, in which the issues it raises are most entangled, and in which its generic categorisation is most fluid. Through the concrete reality of often life-and-death situations, human-animal encounters move into the magical, mythical and spiritual, with the animal emerging as what we know, through our own physicality, have forgotten, and, finally, imagine. How humans respond to this simultaneous similarity and alterity is bound up with the culturally-specific stories we tell about the animal gaze as well as our own shared creaturely reality. In Libyan fiction, animals, echoing the long tradition of 'signs' (*āyāt*) in Arabic tradition, and the Sufi visions emerging from it, signify both wonder and warning, taking humans beyond what they know, confronting them with hard facts, but also allowing them to imagine what can move beyond these facts.

Afterword – Creaturely Remains

In late 2014, an iconic bronze Italian-era statue of a naked woman, reaching to embrace a gazelle, disappeared from a famous roundabout in Tripoli. Many attribute its disappearance to Islamist groups, who officials claim had earlier made threats against it. Before its disappearance, the statue was also hit in the stomach by a missile, and later draped in cloth to conceal its nakedness. Commenting on its disappearance, 'Umar al-Kiddī concludes that, rather than being stolen, 'the belle and her gazelle' (*al-ghazāla wa-l-ḥasnā'*) most likely fled of their own accord, escaping the violence that has continued to tear Libya apart since the longed-for collapse of Gaddafi's regime in 2011.[998]

The statue, and the vision of simple, creaturely fellowship that it embodies, poignantly captures the tragedy of Libya's movement from one period of uncertainty to another, with its inhabitants caught up in ideology and violence. It also brings me to another important theme in Libyan literature: that of abandoned ruins and works of art. While rooted in the historical eras in which they were created, and expressive of the ideologies from which they were borne, these relics are also infused, in fiction, with human passions, and marked by neglect and violence. Despite representing the permanence of stone, and the striving of human artistry to transcend contingent circumstances, they therefore echo much of the creaturely poetics that I have explored through animals, representing 'signs', hailing from illusive 'other worlds', while also subject to the vagaries of the present.

Several of these relics have already been examined. Ibrāhīm al-Kūnī's ancient cave paintings, for example, echo the current plight of desert animals, while the statue of

[998] 'Umar al-Kiddī, '*al-Ghazāla wa-l-ḥasnā' tahrubān min Ṭarābulus*,' *hunasotak*, May 11, 2014, accessed June 14, 2016, https://hunasotak.com/article/12896.

the dog Ramaḍān turns its 'unflustered' gaze to the 'fleeting world'. In wider Libyan fiction, these remains take the further form of human, animal, and sometimes simply stone. In Hisham Matar's *The Country of Men*, for example, Suleiman is taken on a day trip to Leptis Magna, perceiving the solitary vulnerability of its crumbling ruins: 'Absence was everywhere. Arches stood without the walls and roofs of the shops they had once belonged to and seemed, in the empty square under the open sky, like old men trying to remember where they were going'.[999] A similar quote from Kamal Ben Hameda has also already been examined, recalling the 'splendeurs défuntes' of Cyrene, Sabratha and Leptis Magna, and the ghosts of former combatants flitting through them.[1000]

The statue of the girl and her gazelle, meanwhile, has appeared particularly frequently in fiction. In Aḥmad Ibrāhīm al-Faqīh's *Nafaq yuḍī'uhu imra'a wāḥida* (1991; *A Tunnel Lit by One Woman*), the male narrator interprets it as an embodiment of 'desire' and 'prayer', representing a lost ideal amidst dissatisfactory reality.[1001] His female companion, meanwhile, sees only the 'alienation of a woman and her gazelle, stranded there in a square in the midst of the noise and smoke of the lorries'.[1002] Through both interpretations, the multi-faceted nature of statues in Libyan fiction becomes clear. On the one hand, they, like animals, represent visions of a lost ideal, from the past glories of Leptis Magna to the freedom and beauty of girl and gazelle. On the other, they also become a locus for exploring political oppression, the transformations brought by modernity and, perhaps more than anything else, the inevitability of neglect and degradation.

[999] Matar, *In the Country of Men*, 26.
[1000] Ben Hameda, 'Dans les sables Libyens,' 48.
[1001] Al-Faqīh, *Gardens of the Night*, 474.
[1002] Ibid., 75.

In ''*Awdat al-Qayṣar*' (2004; 'The Return of Caesar', trans. Ethan Chorin, 2008) by Miftāḥ Qanāw (b. 1958), a bronze statue of Septimius Severus (145-211) comes to life.[1003] Known as 'the African Emperor', Severus was born in what is today Libya, and ruled the Roman Empire from 193 to 211. Among his greatest achievements is the revival and expansion of Leptis Magna (*Labda*), a city of traders and farmers in the North-West of today's country. Qanāw's story, meanwhile, draws on the removal of the famous statue by Gaddafi in the 1970s from what was then Green Square (*al-Sāḥa al-Khaḍrā'*). After decades of neglect, the statue eventually found its way back to Leptis Magna. According to archaeologist Hafed Walda, Gaddafi viewed it as a threat to his own star status, and an unwelcome reminder of Libya's former glories, contrasted to its current difficulties.[1004] His distrust was, furthermore, not wholly unfounded, as, according to Walda, the statue had become an important symbol of opposition, a means for concealing subversive messages, and an expression of desire for a better reality.[1005]

In Qanāw's story, the statue of Severus sadly observes the decline of the once splendid Leptis, deprived not only of its former inhabitants, but also of tourists, indicating Libya's insularity under Gaddafi. In his depression, he also goes to visit his old home, the Green Square in Tripoli, where he witnesses what Ethan Chorin describes as the city's 'physical degeneration' during the 1980s and 1990s: 'Caesar looked around him. Everything was different. Chaos and destruction sopped up memories wherever they might be (*laḥaqa al-kharāb dhākiratahu ayḍan*)'.[1006] While in Tripoli, Severus also visits the girl and her gazelle, witnessing how she, too, has changed: 'Over the years, her

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[1003] Miftāḥ Qanāw, ''*Awdat al-Qayṣar*,' in '*Awdat al-Qayṣar*, 17-24 (Benghazi: Majlis Tanmiyat al-Ibdā' al-Thaqāfī, 2004); trans. Ethan Chorin, 'Caesar's Return,' in Ethan Chorin, ed., *Translating Libya: In Search of the Libyan Short Story*, 172-75 (London: Darf Publishers, 2015).

[1004] Charlotte Higgins, 'How Gaddafi Toppled a Roman Emperor,' in *The Guardian Online*, November 28, 2011, accessed June 14, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2011/nov/28/libya-muammar-gaddafi.

[1005] Ibid.

[1006] Chorin, ed., *Translating Libya*, 177; Qanāw, 'Caesar's Return,' 174; ''*Awdat al-qayṣar*,' 22.

faded smile had lost its former allure, her lips cracked by an intense thirst'.[1007] 'Neglect' (*ihmāl*) is, in Severus' eyes, the 'distinguishing mark' (*sima mumayyiza*) of life in the city, and the story concludes as he and the girl join a queue, waiting to leave for Malta.[1008]

Rather than simply bringing a historical character to life, the story's animation of a material relic anchors it in the transformation of place, and its exposure, like the creatures that inhabit it, to time and neglect. Meanwhile, Manṣūr Bushnāf's (b. 1954) *al-'Alka* (2008; *Chewing Gum*, trans. Mona Zaki, 2014) presents perhaps the most extended and nuanced depiction of a statue, carved by an Italian prisoner of the Ottoman Empire as he languishes in the dungeons of Tripoli's Red Castle (*al-Sarāy al-Ḥamrā'*).[1009] Two sections of the novel, 'The Statue' and 'The Statue 2', are dedicated to exploring its creation, history and the human lives it has affected. For decades, it is said to have been neglected by 'British, Royalists and Revolutionaries', none of whose ideological interests would clearly be strengthened by it. Eventually, it is moved to a forgotten corner of the Red Palace, and, although intended to be shipped to Leptis Magna with Septimius Severus, remains there, with 'no connection to any historical era' and embarking 'on its own journey through time'.[1010]

The statue of the woman does, indeed, stand outside all official ideologies and discourses. Principally, she embodies desire, with her head thrown back, her eyes closed and 'her lips pursed as if waiting for a kiss'.[1011] This expression of desire is rooted not in a particular aesthetic school of thought, but simply in the 'pain and longing' of

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[1007] Qanāw, 'Caesar's Return,' 175.

[1008] Qanāw, ''*Awdat al-qayṣar*,' 23.

[1009] Manṣūr Bushnāf, *Chewing Gum*, trans. Mona Zaki (London: Darf Publishers, 2014). *Chewing Gum* was first published in Arabic in Cairo, 2008, under the title *Sarāb al-layl... al-'alka* (*Night Mirage, or the Tale of the Chewing Gum*). Banned by the Gaddafi regime, it has not yet been republished in Arabic, and details of the first edition have proved impossible to find. Darf Publishers intend to republish the Arabic soon.

[1010] Bushnāf, *Chewing Gum*, 17-18.

[1011] Ibid., 11.

its sculptor, and his desire for female company amidst the discomforts of 'dampness', 'stifling heat' and 'humidity'.[1012] Born of creaturely suffering, confusion and longing, the statue combines moral, emotional and physical opposites, frustrating any attempts at interpretation: 'Our statue is an embodiment of smoothness and violence, stillness and propulsion, pleasure and pain, the angelic and the demonic, the feminine and the masculine, all dryads born in captivity, in the absence of freedom'.[1013]

The statue, like its creator, is then also neglected for decades, until a Libyan Professor of Archaeology takes an interest in it, attempting to prove that it was sculpted by a Libyan, and conferring upon it a renewed 'national and cultural value'.[1014] Unable to validate his claims, however, he soon becomes a figure of ridicule, with his theories threatening to destroy his career, and seen only as a 'reflection of his inflated nationalistic sentiments'.[1015] Like the cave art in al-Kūnī's *Nazīf al-ḥajar*, the statue evades human definition, categorization and, above all, possession, representing a striking contrast to the ways in which heritage is most often imagined, and the uses to which it is put.

As historian David Lowenthal remarks, the contemporary era is characterized by a drive towards preserving heritage, from modern memorabilia to prehistoric pottery.[1016] Underlying it is a strongly nationalist impulse, akin to religious faith, with artefacts preserved in an almost obsessive manner. Commenting on this impulse, Lowenthal questions:

[1012] Ibid., 80.
[1013] Ibid., 79-80.
[1014] Ibid., 77.
[1015] Ibid. 83.
[1016] David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (London: Viking, 1996), 3-4.

> Why this rash of backward-looking concern? What makes heritage so crucial in a world beset by poverty and hunger, enmity and strife? We seek comfort in past bequests partly to allay these griefs. In recoiling from grievous loss or fending off a fearsome future, people the world over revert to ancestral legacies.[1017]

While resulting in the preservation of important artefacts, Lowenthal indicates the dangers of this impulse: 'Credence in a mythic past crafted for some present cause suppresses history's impartial complexity. Touting our own heritage as uniquely splendid sanctions narrow-minded ignorance and breeds belligerent bigotry'.[1018] For Lowenthal, the past represents a 'foreign country', whose unknowability drives people to define it for their own purposes.[1019] In many ways, it thus serves a similar purpose to the animal, being employed to cement values, hierarchies and identities. At the same time, it can, like the animal, be used to deconstruct them in powerful manners.

In Libyan fiction, contrary to the predominantly Western impulses that Lowenthal explores, 'history's impartial complexity' is at the heart of depictions of material heritage, subject, like the country's inhabitants, to the vagaries of oppression, ideology and neglect. The past embodied in these artefacts is also more ambiguous, and less subject to glorifying national narratives. While Septimius Severus clearly represents a point of pride, and symbol of opposition to tyranny, the girl with her gazelle is the product of the same Italians who imprisoned and massacred nomadic populations in the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, her 2014 disappearance results from the conservatism of Islamists, suppressing expressions of freedom and desire. Amongst this complex web of ongoing events it becomes hard to classify her, and similar

[1017] Ibid., x-xi.
[1018] Ibid., 2.
[1019] David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985), 411.

nuances are embodied in the statue of *al-'Alka*, encapsulating Libyan history, recovered from the narratives of former rulers in all its 'impartial complexity'. Furthermore, she provokes passions that are shared by all humans, regardless of status or nation, as, during her time in the Red Palace, guards and soldiers from Sicily, Libya, Italy and the USA become enamoured of her to the point of obsession. Belonging to no one, yet intriguing all, she expresses the historical contingencies of time and place, in which, like animals, she is rooted, as well as the universal, timeless emotions of longing and love.

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